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VOL. 2853.

FOR HIS SAKE BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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FOR HIS SAKE.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,
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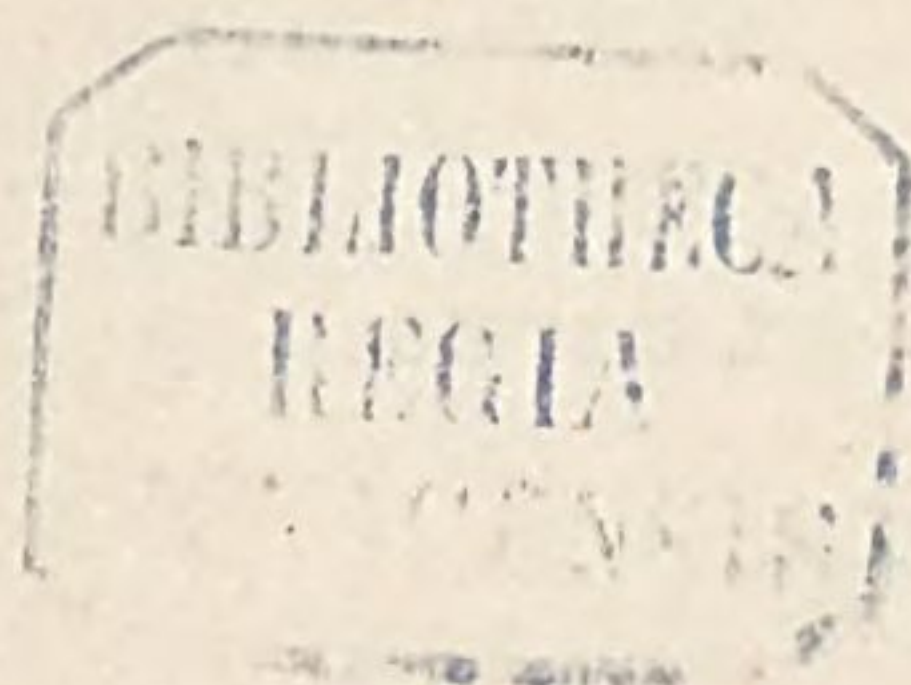
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1892.



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FOR HIS SAKE.

CHAPTER I.

AT FIRST SIGHT.

“THERE was a sound of revelry by night.” I shall not continue the quotation—for that famous description is singularly inapplicable to the ball I am going to write about.

It was given some—nay, a good many years ago, when old things had not quite passed away; when there were not two railways to every second-rate market town; when a few of the humbler tradespeople did *not* visit London *every* year, and when English regiments still had numbers and rough, but affectionate, nicknames.

This particular revelry was held in honour of a great occasion—the opening, in short, of the grand spick and span new Town Hall, with its annexed concert-room, ball-room, banqueting-room, and all the other rooms which the mayor and burgesses of the great, growing, money-coining, commerce-expanding seaport of Freightsborough could by possibility require.

Freightsborough, as every one knows, is a big place, morally and physically big. In fact, its citizens speak of it with awe, and the meanest among them felt his spirit burn within him and the money in his pockets turn of itself as he thought of all that Town Hall had cost; of the cut stone and the marbles, the allegorical statues, the gilding and the painting, the inlaying, the polishing, the mirrors, the lustres, the candelabras and general magnificence, for which the wealthy citizens had poured forth their gold with unstinted hand.

Everything was done regardless of expense. The mayor had caught a youthful royal highness to open the ball with his pretty young wife. The consorts and daughters of the distinguished citizens were attired in beauteous garments and blazed with jewels; the nobility and gentry of the neighbouring county, Lynshire (every one knows *how* blue is the blood, and occasionally the noses, of the Lynshire folk)—even these lofty mortals flocked to see what Freightsborough could do—nor were they sent empty away. The refreshments were as gorgeous as everything else.

The ball was at its height. The dances were rather crowded, the floor waxed to perfection, the music most inspiriting.

The vast ball-room was divided into three by a row of handsome pillars across either end. Beyond these the floor was carpeted, and easy chairs in crimson and gold abounded.

In one of these carpeted divisions, furthest from the entrance, a group of men in uniform were talking and laughing together, with an air of intimacy and separate-

ness from the rest of the community not unusual among soldiers.

At this period of history Freightsborough shared the protection of an infantry regiment with the venerable city of Lynchester, a sleepy old place situated at some distance on the same river which near Freightsborough widened into a grand highway for the commercial fleets that sailed and steamed to and from the great seaport.

To these cheerful warriors approached a young man in a dark green uniform, adorned with black braid and lightened here and there with gleams of silver. A very pleasant-looking young man, not much above middle height, well-made, graceful, distinguished, with short, curly dark hair, bright, mischievous hazel eyes and small, nearly black moustaches, under which his white teeth gleamed with an amused smile, as he dexterously skirted the moving mass of dancers, neither doing nor receiving harm.

"You lazy beggars!" was his salutation. "Is *this* the way you earn the magnificent repast which awaits you?"

"Speak for yourself," returned one of the group, an older man, in staff uniform. "Have you trotted out a partner, or in any way deserved the goods our Freightsborough hosts have no doubt provided?"

"Well, no! but it is not my fault! My spirit is most willing, but the stewards are weak! That is, I am wildly anxious for an introduction to the most charming, exquisite, airy wood-nymph of a girl I ever beheld! Have none of you purblind earthy creatures noticed her?"

"One of Tremaine's numerous swans!"

“Another peerless Dulcinea?”

“Hav’n’t seen any one answering to the description,” returned several of the men, while an elder officer of a serious aspect, and with a touch of Scotch in his accent asked, “Is she a young thing with a bit up-turned nose, and some oak leaves in her golden chestnut locks, who seems to have a good solid homely father and mother with her?”

“That’s it!—that’s the bright particular star,” cried Tremaine eagerly, “only those worthy people are NOT her father and mother, I am sure! Come along and introduce me like a good fellow.”

“Eh! but I cannot! I have no acquaintance with any one of them, only I noticed the young lady—she *is* more of a swan than your general sort, my laddie!”

“It’s too infernally provoking!” exclaimed Tremaine. “I am certain she dances divinely, and I left her struggling with an appalling cad who was prancing regardless of time or anything else! Nobody knows her! By Jove, I will *not* be done in this way! I’ll just go and pretend to remember her, then apologize for the mistake, get up a little talk, and ask her to dance. Eh?”

“You’ve the impudence of old Nick!”

“Never fear! You’ll manage it.”

“Go in and win, Dick.”

“Bet two to one you’ll be found out.”

“And your last state will be worse than the first,” were some of the comments evoked by this daring proposition.

“You must execute the manœuvre under inspection,” said the staff man.

"By all means," returned Dick Tremaine. "Nothing venture, nothing have."

So saying he stepped forward beyond the pillar, against which he had been leaning while he spoke, scanning at the same time the dancers as they passed, hoping to point out the object of his admiration to his comrades.

For a moment his courage was checked, for, not a yard from where he had stood when stating his audacious intentions, was the young lady of whom he had spoken so freely. She was with the respectable-looking couple he had noticed, and looking away as if watching somebody or something. "Suppose she heard?" was his first thought; "No—impossible!" the second. A glance at the amused, smiling faces of his friends, and he advanced boldly—a low bow, as the young lady's eyes suddenly met his, then in the most insinuating tones of his pleasant youthful voice, he began—

"I am afraid you have forgotten me! though of course I do not suppose you would remember as *I* do——"

The fair girl coloured quickly, then smiled—such a radiant smile. "Ah, yes!" she said, stretching out her hand. "How do you do, and how is your brother?"

His brother? Tremaine almost lost his head. Was there ever so extraordinary a contretemps? *She* thought she knew him. He had a brother—yes, all men have brothers. Now it was all plain sailing, at any rate the present was secure; the future must take care of itself.

"Oh, my brother is in the highest possible preservation," he replied joyously, "and will be so pleased to

hear of you. Will you give me this waltz? I hope you are disengaged?"

"I shall be very pleased." Their eyes met again. What wonderful eyes she had! Blue? no—deep grey, with long, dark lashes under which at times they looked almost black.

"Going to dance, my dear?" asked the little roly-poly woman who seemed to be the Wood Nymph's chaperon.

"Yes! Where shall I find you?"

"At the opposite end, near the door," returned the homely shrewd-looking man, who seemed the escort of both. "We'll try to support exhausted nature while you are flourishing the 'light fantastic toe.'"

"First come to wait," returned their *protégée*, as she took Tremaine's arm.

"By Jove! What luck!" he exclaimed. "The first instalment are going off to supper. We shall have room to move."

"And they are playing those heavenly Tausend und eine Nacht waltzes," she returned. "The fates *are* propitious."

"They never were so propitious to *me* before," murmured Tremaine, putting his arm round her.

His anticipations were fulfilled. She waltzed superbly—steady, light, with an indescribable swaying of her delicate frame to the music, as if the strain was playing through her nerves and muscles, and which communicated an electric sense of enjoyment to her impressionable partner. She was so light, so smooth of step, that they kept up for several rounds; and when at last Tremaine, fearing she might be fatigued, paused

near the place from whence they had started, she heaved a slight sigh as if profoundly satisfied. So was Tremaine, for he was conscious of an admiring circle of his watchful friends and for the moment felt capable of conquering kingdoms.

"I never knew what dancing was before," he exclaimed with ardour.

"And you are immensely improved," said his partner, raising her eyes to his with such a laughing look that it made him feel ill at ease. Did she identify him with some awkward unlicked cub, at whose expense she was in the habit of making merry? He must draw her away from her reminiscences, or he would get into trouble. "I am infinitely flattered," he returned; "I am sure there was room for improvement. And now, suppose we take a turn round to the entrance? Then you will want some supper."

"Yes, I am rather hungry; you know I was always hungry in the old days."

"Yes—yes, of course—delightful old days," and they whirled off once more.

"If I could get the faintest idea of whom I am supposed to be," he said to himself, "I might steer safely through this awful, delightful passage. Old days! Why, I have been nearly four years in India! She must have been in the schoolroom or nursery four years ago; it is barely six months since we came back, and in that time—no!—nor in all the time before, have I met anything like her. We must have been early friends—by Jove, I may presume upon *that!*"

"I do not see my friends anywhere," said the young

lady, looking round, as they paused opposite the entrance.

"No, of course not, they are still devouring; we will look for them afterwards. Let us sup first; you must be famished."

The supper-room was full, but Tremaine, who was troubled with no diffidence, managed to get his partner's wants provided for. "Chicken and tongue was I think your favourite," he said boldly, placing a plate before her.

"Yes, it does very nicely, thank you; and tell me, does your brother give you as much trouble as ever?"

His brother! Why, his only brother was his mentor, had been his guardian and the sedate head of a City firm. But Tremaine was equal to the occasion.

"Well—no; he is always a little obstinate, but not a bad fellow."

Why the deuce did she never look at him save with eyes brimming over with laughter? and when not laughing or looking at him, the expression of her face was certainly sad; even the delicate little up-turned nose noticed by his Scotch friend had a pathetic air. Her voice was soft and musical, but not quite English, the tones were more varied.

"And where are you staying?" was Tremaine's next attempt, spoken with a well put on air of old acquaintanceship.

"Oh, we only came in for the ball; we return home to-morrow."

Then some demon prompted Tremaine to say, "The old home, I suppose?"

"Yes, always the same."

"Then you must let me have the pleasure of calling to see you, and——"

"What! come all that way for a morning visit?" she exclaimed, opening her large grey eyes.

"Oh, I suppose there is an hotel of some kind where a fellow could put up. I would take a longer journey to see *you*," with a melting admiring glance.

"You were always rather adventurous," she said gravely. "But *this* would indeed be an imprudence."

"Good heavens!" thought Tremaine, quivering with curiosity and interest, "am I an old lover! I am quite willing to play the part."

"Imprudence!" he said aloud. "How so?"

"You know the prejudices of my people."

"Well, yes, unfortunately. But haven't they toned down?"

"No, they have toned up." She spoke without raising her eyes. "In short, it would be much better not to attempt a visit—or to see me again."

"But why—for heaven's sake, why?"

"Ah, it is a long story! Only *promise* me not to attempt it."

"I cannot promise that," cried Tremaine, and paused, thinking, "If I say more I may learn some secret not intended for me, but I can't agree to lose sight of her." "I do not presume to ask any questions," he said, "but to promise not to try and see you again! It would be no good, I'd be sure to break my word. I *must* see you again."

"I do not think you will," looking at him with a beaming smile, "and I don't think you care much, or

you would have managed it before, considering that it is six months since you returned from India."

This last stroke absolutely silenced Tremaine. "It's some fellow in the regiment," he said to himself. "Shall I make a clean breast of it? No, I dare not."

"Come," continued his bewildering companion, "we *must* go and find my chaperon, and you have talked all the time, so you have had no supper."

"Have another waltz first," exclaimed Tremaine.

She shook her head. "I have kept them too late as it is. They are accustomed to go to bed at ten."

"I don't think I remember——" began Tremaine hesitatingly.

"No. You never met them before," she interrupted.

"Thank heaven for that!" he ejaculated inwardly.

"No, I saw they were strangers," he said aloud with an air of candour. "But you must not be implacable, you must give me a chance of explaining——"

"I dare not," she interrupted gravely, shaking her head. "So do not trouble about it any more."

"I must, I will," exclaimed Tremaine ardently, as he offered his arm to lead her from the supper room, "I cannot renounce the hope of seeing you again." She looked at him seriously for an instant, then her sweet red lips quivered and parted with an amused smile as she said, "I am afraid you must make up your mind to it."

"I will not! I shall see you again, no matter what it costs, and—and——"

"Talk over old times?" she put in, with indescribable coquettish demureness.

"Yes, to talk of anything. What a nuisance!" he exclaimed as they reached the door of the ball-room, "it is a humdrum quadrille."

"And here are my good friends," she added.

There they were, sitting in smiling patience, each in a luxurious arm-chair.

"Oh!" cried Tremaine's unknown divinity, "I am afraid I have kept you very late."

"And I am daring enough," added Tremaine quickly, "to hope you will be so very good as to wait for the next waltz. This dance is nearly over." There was something very persuasive in his boyish ardent eagerness.

The goodnatured-looking plump little woman in black velvet and grey feathers opened her lips, Tremaine felt assured to grant his request, when to his infinite mortification his quick eyes caught a telegraphic communication from his mysterious partner to her chaperon. It was a slight but decided shake of the head which meant "no" if ever a shake of the head did! Accordingly the rosy smiling matron said, "I am afraid we must go now; it is really very late for us country folk. Come, papa, we had better secure a cab before the crowd begins to move off," and taking her husband's arm (Tremaine concluded they must be husband and wife) they led the way to the cloak-room. Tremaine immediately offered his to the young lady.

"Why are you so cruelly unkind?" he said in a low tone. "I saw you give your chaperon a significant warning to take you away. *Why* do you want to evade me? Why will you give me no clue—no chance of seeing you again? Have I done anything in the bygone days

that offended you?—anything worthy of death or of bonds, that you should punish me in this way?"

"No—no—nothing at all, but we have had a delightful dance, a pleasant chat. That is enough for—Oh! for an indefinite period of time! so just go back to the ball-room and find another partner."

"I dance no more to-night," he exclaimed. "How could I, after having had the queen of the waltz for a partner?" Here they reached the ladies' cloak-room, and with a warning up-lifted forefinger his fascinating companion vanished within the portals.

Tremaine waited doggedly outside, and presently the happy-looking little matron and her fair charge reappeared.

"Come, my dears," said the "Herr Papa," "I have secured a cab!"

Once more Tremaine pressed close to his ex-partner's side. "Are you quite inexorable?" he whispered.

"Well, yes!" she returned, blushing and smiling. "The fact is, I see you have only a *very* vague recollection of my face, *you* do not remember me as *I* do" (with distracting emphasis). "I am quite sure you don't know my name, or cannot remember it."

"Why do you imagine such nonsense? I will not gratify you by saying it; but the impression you have made——"

"Make haste, my dear," cried the stout gentleman. Another moment and Tremaine had lost her.

"Where to?" he asked, with eager courtesy. "Twenty-five, Devonshire Terrace, Wrexham Park—thank you." Tremaine repeated the direction to the driver. Another moment and the conveyance rolled off, his last glimpse

of his puzzling partner leaving the picture of a sweet smiling Greuze-like face and the warning forefinger again upheld.

"Twenty-five, Devonshire Terrace, Wrexham Park," repeated Tremaine, as he stood gazing after the vanishing vehicle. "I'll be there as soon as decency will permit, to-morrow. I daresay the bird, the sweet bright mocking-bird, will have flown, but for all that, I'll get on her tracks, and I'll follow them whatever it costs. Why, the wish to apologize for imposing on her, the desire to make a clean breast of it will be sufficient excuse. What a charming creature, a regular thoroughbred, whoever her companions may be. She fancied she knew me; but if *I* had *ever* met her at any period of my life or hers, even when she was in the nursery, I could *never* have forgotten her. 'One of my swans,' they said. No, I never met anything half so charming before." So saying to himself the young rifleman hastened to the cloak-room to extricate his cap and cloak, and then walked briskly away towards the barracks.

The morning duties were over, and some of the officers had adjourned to luncheon—usually an exceedingly irregular meal in barracks. Some discussed the odds on the Grand National Steeple-chase, others some regimental changes. The various groups were melting away when Tremaine came into the mess-room.

"What became of you last night, my lad?" asked Major MacIntyre, who, though considerably older, was his fast friend. "I saw you whirling round in great form, and then you disappeared."

"Was the fascinating unknown a mermaid?—and

did she drag you down into unknown depths?" asks another.

"Did she vanish at twelve o'clock?" added a third.

"Or leave her glass slipper behind and turn into a mere commonplace Cinderella?" put in a bay lieutenant.

"All wrong!" returned Tremaine, who looked joyous and considerably fresher than his comrades. "I succeeded in finding her temporary abode! Alas! she has fled, but I suspect not very far."

"Name—Name—Name!" cried the others in chorus.

"Can't tell you!" returned Tremaine. "My queen, as she certainly is at present, had only come over for the ball yesterday, and left early this morning with the respectable-looking butler and housekeeper, who appear to have been in charge of her majesty. The servant who opened the door to me this morning did not know her name, but *did* know that the elderly pair came from Lynchester; and, it strikes me, I shall have pressing business there in a day or two."

"You have the de'il's own luck—or it may prove ill luck—Tremaine!" cried the Major, "for your company and Brookes' are ordered to relieve those stationed at Lynchester!"

"By Jove! There's a chance!" exclaimed Tremaine exultingly. "At any rate, they say it is a capital quarter. There's a bishop, a dean and chapter—a sort of guarantee for sound port as well as doctrine. Country squires eager to show you no end of sport—fishing in summer, hunting and shooting in winter—can the soul of man want more?"

"To say nothing of a particular chase to while the hours away!" put in the lieutenant.

On this topic, however, Tremaine would say no more. He dexterously slipped from it into conjectures respecting the society and surroundings of Lynchester.

Most of the men present were strangers to the place; but one, Captain Brooke, observed that the mother of a friend of his—Rashleigh, of the Horse Artillery—lived there, and he intended to call upon her, as he believed they were in a good county set.

“You remember Rashleigh at Sialkat, don’t you, Tremaine?”

“Yes; a silent sort of fellow, but not bad. Cared for nothing but sport, and rarely showed up in society.”

“Just so,” said Brooke, with a nod. “I fancy Lynchester will be a change for the better. May they leave us there in peace till we have exhausted the fascinations of the old place.”

CHAPTER II, ON THE TRACK.

THE ancient city of Lynchester was serenely proud of its many advantages. Romans, Saxons, Normans had left the traces of their respective occupation within the comparatively narrow limits of its walls. The time-worn towers of the cathedral dominated the buildings which surrounded them with an air of beneficent superiority—from its belfry, which trembled with the swing and reverberation of its grand old bell, “the curfew” for centuries had “tollèd the knell of parting day,” sending its sonorous music far over city and river and plain, a deep-toned assurance of rest and safety.

The gateways, much pieced and repaired, still stood in their original places and bore their original names, and the Market Cross, though much effaced, was still considered a noble monument and splendid decoration, beneath which Catholic and Protestant had been burnt alternately as their parties predominated.

On the south-west was the castle, dating from the Roman period, part of which still existed and was incorporated in the modern barracks. At this side too a modern bridge spanned the river which, sweeping down from its source amid a neighbouring range of hills, against the north-east wall, made a circuit of this side of the fortifications before rushing away to Freightsborough and the sea.

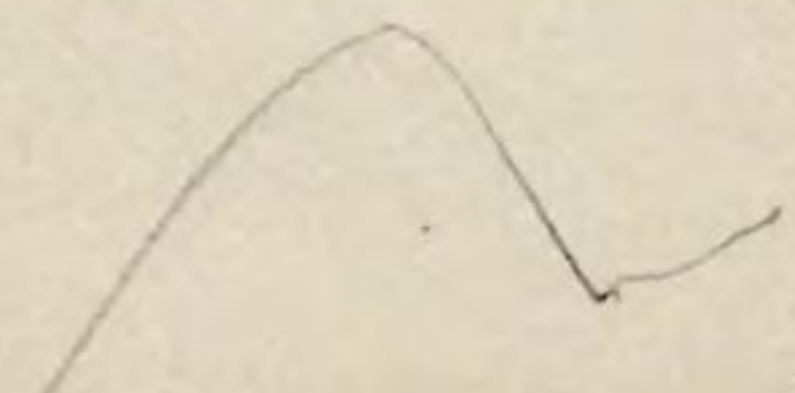
This bridge and the road across it, led to another source of legitimate pride, the splendid seat of the Marquises of Bobingham, Lynton Towers—a regular show place, with a ghost, secret chambers, a moat, a picture gallery and a terrible, respectable housekeeper in black silk, with a huge bunch of keys, all complete.

With a bishop and the clerical dignitaries which congregate around such an exalted centre, to say nothing of a marquis as it were next door, it need hardly be said that the society of Lynchester was refined, select, aristocratic in the highest sense. In short butter would not melt in its delicate refrigerated mouth! Scientific whist, classical music, antiquarian and ecclesiastical history lectures, beguiled its dignified leisure, while for the more frivolous youth of the county, why, there was the Hunt Ball, the Infirmary Ball and the County Ball; flower shows and tennis tournaments in summer, and the inexhaustible pleasures of the chase in winter.

Such were the attractions and advantages offered to young Tremaine and his companions in arms on their installation in the stately old city.

Tremaine, who had a keen eye for the picturesque and a dim uncultivated artistic sense, was charmed with the curious mediæval-looking streets, the carved and decorated fronts of the older houses, often surmounted by a quaint inscription, a text or line of Latin. Moreover, his avowed interest in this specimen of the past afforded him an excellent excuse for rambling about in all directions, really hoping to meet the fascinating partner who had puzzled and evaded him; but in vain.

He could find no trace of her. In vain he attended the Cathedral service on Sunday afternoons, according



to the fashion of the Lynchestrians, who worshipped at their parish churches in the morning, but indulged in the sober dissipation of vespers at the Cathedral when they had done their parochial duty.

No pensive face and quick mischievous smile, no speaking, mocking, warning eyes such as haunted him, looked out from under the various bonnets and hats at which he gazed with such earnest perseverance as to elicit a good deal of notice from the wearers.

It was tiresome and mortifying. He had no difficulty in identifying the elderly couple who had been in charge of the fair unknown. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Winter—so an old retired bachelor colonel, a veteran gossip and diner-out, had informed him.

"He is the crack banker here," he added, "rather a new man too; something of a cad. But you see, when the old County Bank smashed up about twenty years ago, people didn't know whether they were on their heads or their heels. So Winter, who is brother to and partner with the big Freightsborough banker, established a branch here. He's deuced rich, and not a bad little fellow. He has got on socially in a sort of way. I'll introduce you to him. The wife is a good house-keeping sort of woman; gives you a capital dinner, by George! They are very hospitable."

"Thank you," said Tremaine; but he was careful to add nothing as to the reason of his grateful acceptance of Colonel Blackett's offer.

If only he had the *entrée* of Winter's house he could not fail to find some clue to the mystery which fascinated him.

"Come, Tremaine!" said Brooke, his captain, as they

returned from a ride through Lord Bobingham's park; "it is just the proper time for a stiff visit; will you support me through an interview with Mrs. Rashleigh, who has deigned to signify her readiness to receive me; I believe she is a tremendous dowager?"

"All right, I am your man," returned Tremaine.

Having brushed off the dust of their expedition, the two men betook themselves to the City Wall. They walked leisurely along, the river chafing beneath the overhanging parapet for a few hundred yards, till they reached the massive Bridge gate, where they descended to the street and passed through it.

Here the ground rose steeply from the river, from which the city receded, leaving a space between the wall and the brow of the height, where some cottages stood; then came a red stone wall, succeeded by a space of iron railing, permitting a view of evergreens and flowering shrubs; and next a solid-looking two-storied "Queen Anne" mansion, also built of red stone, became visible, with tall narrow windows, the sashes painted very white; the wide steps to the entrance, the window ledges and pediments were all of much-cleaned white stone. A high wrought-iron gate showed that the hall door was open in country fashion, but a few steps within stood a high folding-screen, covered with leather and decorated with richly coloured birds perching on the branches of gilded trees, which blocked a further view of the interior.

"This is an old-world sort of place," exclaimed Brooke, pulling the bell.

"Merely modern, compared to the antiquities within the walls," returned Tremaine.

An extremely neat rigid-looking elderly woman descended the steps and opened the gate to the visitors.

"Yes," she said; "Mrs. Rashleigh was at home, and would see them."

They followed her into a very handsome hall, so highly polished that both men were thankful for a pathway of crimson cloth which ran down the middle.

This hall evidently bisected the house, as it had another door, partly glass and also open, at the further end, which gave a glimpse of a beautifully green grass plot, from which there was evidently a sudden descent to the river, as the fields and trees at the opposite side were visible.

Their guide turned to the right and opened the door of what seemed to be an ante-chamber. It was plentifully supplied with the stiffest of spidery empire furniture, ornamental shelves supporting treasures of china, and small oval mirrors which considerably distorted anything reflected in them. Folding-doors at the opposite side stood open, and a murmur of conversation came through them; they were admitted into a large drawing-room, handsomely furnished in the same cold old-fashioned style, without books or piano, or et-ceteras of any kind, and ending in a wide bay, the windows of which commanded the river, with a partial view of the fine old many-arched bridges over which the Cavalier forces of the faithful town had marched to the King's help at the fatal field of Worcester.

The aspect of the room was depressing, nor did the comrades in arms find the company more cheering.

On a sort of classical sofa sat a stately-looking lady clothed in black velvet, a fichu of fine white lace crossed

high round her throat, where it was fastened by a gold brooch, the ends secured by gold pins to a waistband, from which hung a gold *châtelaine*. She was a woman considerably past middle age, yet her skin was marvellously fair and smooth; the brilliancy of a pair of searching dark eyes was increased by a tinge of not quite natural colour, and her white hair was arranged in a row of soft feathery curls at either side of her rather long thin face; these were surmounted by a cap of delicate lace. She rose as her visitors approached, with a certain widening of the mouth intended for a gracious smile.

This imposing personage was not alone. Two ladies in handsome and passably fashionable out-door attire, evidently mother and daughter, were seated, tea-cups in hand, near the hostess, and a third presided at the tea-table.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Captain Brooke," said Mrs. Rashleigh in a composed tone and with measured accents, extending a bony hand clothed in a black lace mitten, while she looked from one to the other slightly puzzled.

"You are very good," returned Brooke, taking, it with a bow. "Allow me to present Mr. Tremaine, who is also an acquaintance of Captain Rashleigh's."

"Any friend of my dear son's is welcome to me," she said, shaking hands with him. "You are both very good to bestow a visit on an old lady like myself," she continued. "Let me introduce these gentlemen to you, my dear Mrs. Courteney: Captain Brooke, Mr. Tremaine, both officers in the detachment now

here. Mrs. Courteney, Miss Courteney. Perhaps you have made Dean Courteney's acquaintance already."

"As yet we have scarcely had a chance of meeting any one," said Brooke, taking a seat by the lady of the house, "and Tremaine has been absorbed in the picturesque antiquities of this charming old place."

"Ah! indeed. Miss Parry, some tea!" This in a tone of sharp command.

Tremaine immediately went to take the cups from the person thus addressed, a thin and somewhat angular elderly young lady, clad in plum-coloured merino, with a neat black silk apron, her dull fair hair braided smoothly, and a small curl hanging from one side of a small coil at the back.

"Oh, thank you! you are very obliging," she exclaimed with a watery smile and a slight increase of colour, while she looked gratefully at him with pale washed-out blue eyes.

"A taste for antiquities is not usual in young officers," said Mrs. Courteney condescendingly. Her daughter smiled. Tremaine did not feel attracted to either, so he took himself and his cup to the tea-table, and appropriating a slice of bread and butter, observed:

"This town must be a mine of curiosities; I should turn antiquarian myself if I lived here."

"Yes, indeed, it is excessively interesting, and only last winter when digging the foundation for the new wing to the Infirmary, they discovered a Roman bath with tessellated pavement, an apparatus for warming it, and all sorts of curiosities. It is to be all set up in the Museum when the annexe is finished, but I am

afraid the subscriptions come in very slowly; there are so many demands, so many excellent charities—that—that——” she paused.

“Exactly; I know,” put in Tremaine; “one wishes for the purse of Fortunatus.”

Miss Parry simpered gently, and then proceeded to explain that the ruins of St. John’s Priory, which stood in Mrs. Rashleigh’s grounds, were well worth a visit.

Meantime Brooke made polite conversation with “Mrs. Dean” and their hostess, and was growing greatly bored when the door of the ante-chamber, which Tremaine from his post by the tea-table, could see, opened, and a young lady came in, a slight willowy figure, in a soft grey dress with a black lace cape and a large grey hat, the brim of which was turned up at one side, a rose with dark green leaves lying in the glossy chestnut hair beneath. It was his mysterious partner; she held a small basket of flowers and came forward with an air of thoughtfulness and preoccupation, till her eyes caught Tremaine’s, then a quick blush, a look of great surprise showed she recognized him. A scarcely perceptible pause and a slight warning gesture of the upraised hand which, standing where she did, no one but Tremaine could perceive, and she entered with much composure, and going first to Mrs. Courteney shook hands with her and her daughter, making some observation to each.

Mrs. Rashleigh watched her with what seemed to Tremaine not very friendly eyes, and did not attempt to introduce her to Brooke or to himself.

“Have you been robbing the greenhouse?” asked Mrs. Rashleigh.

"I have been robbing *a* greenhouse; but not yours," she returned gently, coldly. "These are from Mrs. Winter's conservatory." Then she set down her little basket, and went over to the tea-table, giving Tremaine a grave courteous smile and bend of the head, to his delight and bewilderment.

"Do you know this gentleman?" asked Mrs. Rashleigh in displeased astonishment.

"I danced with him at the Freightsborough ball," was the quiet answer; and she held out her hand for the cup of tea Miss Parry had already filled.

Tremaine was infinitely delighted—she was not going to cut him, then? He was to be acknowledged, and perhaps allowed to know who he was supposed to be. Meantime, he must be careful to follow her lead.

"Capital ball," he exclaimed, handing her the cake and bread and butter, and presenting the cream and suggesting sugar. "I don't know when I enjoyed a dance so much," and Tremaine eagerly sought her eyes. They did not avoid his, and for a moment he saw that they were brimming over with fun and mischief. It was but for a moment; then the sweet and somewhat pathetic face was as quiet and demure as before.

"Yes; I enjoyed it, too. Then I rarely dance."

"Is it possible? You seemed to me the *beau idéal danseuse*. Doesn't Lynchester dance?"

"Yes; four times a year, and then I stay at home." So saying, she turned away, and drew a chair beside Miss Courteney, to whom she began to talk on the most proper "young lady-like topics"—a difficulty in

the management of the book club—the newest thing in high art needlework—the prospects of a choral meeting during the ensuing summer. In this conversation Tremaine contrived to join; he fancied he detected a little mock seriousness in his puzzling incognita's tone. But Mrs. Courteney rose to take leave.

"I am sure the dean will be most happy to call on—your commanding officer—whose name I forget—and yourself," she said to Captain Brooke. "As a friend of Captain Rashleigh you will be doubly welcome. We generally find our gallant defenders a social acquisition. Come, Florence. We have paid dear Mrs. Rashleigh a terribly long visit."

Civilities were exchanged; Brooke opened the door, and Tremaine rang the bell.

"Come, Tremaine," said the former, "we too have been trespassing on Mrs. Rashleigh's time."

To his surprise, his audacious young sub. approached the formidable lady of the house, and in his most persuasive manner began, "I fear you will think me rather presumptuous; but one of my brother officers and I do photography when we get a chance. So, if you would permit us to take some pictures of the interesting old ruin in your grounds, we should esteem it a very great favour. I should like to send a few views to Captain Rashleigh, who has often spoken of this charming place, and of you!"—an expressive pause.

"I do not object to its being photographed by an amateur," said Mrs. Rashleigh graciously. "But I have steadily refused professionals. We must talk of the project, and perhaps it might be arranged. I am going

to write to my dear son by Friday's mail, and shall tell him I have seen you. Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Tremaine," said the "unnamed" young lady; and Tremaine felt somehow unmasked.

"Pray," said Captain Brooke as the iron gate closed behind them, "when did you start photography?"

"Oh! I have carried old McIntyre's slides for some time," returned Tremaine, "which is quite enough to swear by. If we get leave to photograph the ruins I'll go in as assistant."

"I understand. Then I presume you have found the fascinating unknown you raved about being introduced to at the Freightsborough ball?"

"Exactly," said Tremaine, turning to his companion with a beaming smile. "Isn't it luck?"

"I am not so sure. Don't make a fool of yourself, Dick."

"Oh, no; I shall not—not more than usual."

These sentences were exchanged as the two men passed through a narrow archway, which was a little to the right of the Priory. It had formerly been a postern. The projecting stones, on which the hinges of the gate had been fastened, still remained. This afforded a shorter approach to the Cathedral and more central parts of the town, and from the footway on the wall above well-worn steps led to the lane below.

"I suppose this will take us to the Market place?" said Brooke. "We cannot stray very far in this city. I wonder who your fair friend is? She seems 'at home' in that solemn mansion, and yet a nobody—that is, if she can be made a 'nobody'—which I doubt."

"So do I," echoed Tremaine. "However, 'all things come to him who waits,' knowledge especially, and I daresay we shall find out everything in time."

"I suspect *you* will in no time," returned Brooke, laughing.

"You are too complimentary," began Tremaine, when he caught sight of a familiar figure in uniform turning into the lane from a small side-street which crossed it. "Halloo! there's Maclean; I must catch him. Come back directly," and off darted the lithe lieutenant at double quick.

Though Tremaine left the Priory after this memorable visit in what he considered a disgracefully unenlightened condition, he was shrewd enough to notice a few indications from which he drew certain conclusions.

First, the object of his curiosity was no favourite with the grim mistress of the mansion, which seemed to be her home; secondly, this by no means depressed her, ergo, she was a girl of spirit; thirdly, the plum-coloured lady, who poured out tea, had watched her with kindly admiring eyes, which argued a certain degree of merit on the part of that person who had "lady companion" stamped upon her from head to foot; fourth, the "adorable creature" had found out her mistake, and did not wish any one to know she had mistaken him (Tremaine) for a former acquaintance—good, a secret between them was an "open sesame" to intimacy; and fifth, the top of that archway, near the Priory gate, commanded a complete view of the entrance to Mrs. Rashleigh's house and the garden right and left of it, so far as the railing extended. Moreover, there were a few

old lime trees along the road, which intervened between the city and the Priory walls, which made an excellent cover.

Tremaine pondered these things deeply and in careful silence. He was not to be "drawn" on the subject by the most ingenious of his brother officers, and kept so quiet that they began to forget that he had been violently smitten at the ball.

Some days passed; Tremaine had already accepted the bishop's hospitality, and taken tea with Mrs. Archdeacon, but he had neither asked nor discovered any further particulars respecting the subject uppermost in his mind.

He had been seen a good deal in Major Maclean's company, and had undertaken to reduce a certain chestnut mare, which was rather too much for that gallant officer, to a more manageable condition, but the major was rather a silent self-contained personage, and indeed unbent to few as he did to Tremaine.

"Art is long and time is fleeting"—exceedingly fleeting, thought Tremaine one soft May afternoon as he made his way by various cunning doublings to his post of observation, from which, by the way, he had once seen Mrs. Rashleigh in the garden, holding forth with a fierce aspect to an aged gardener; and on other occasions had beheld the lady companion sallying forth basket in hand as if on a charitable errand, which was not completely satisfactory; but on this Thursday—and Thursday Tremaine's Cornish countrymen considered a lucky day—he was more fortunate. It had rained in the morning, and now the dust was laid, and flowers, grass, shrubs were thankfully giving out fresh odours.

Tremaine had scarcely leant his arms on the rugged top of the wall at a spot which commanded a vista through the leafy branches, when he saw the old gardener leading from the stables, which opened on the road below, a stout pony harnessed to an old-fashioned pony chaise; a fine black-and-tan collie leaped and barked joyously round till the conveyance paused at the high gate. Next the rigid parlour-maid descended the front door steps laden with a hassock and a carriage rug. Then, leaning on her companion's arm, the stately owner of the house appeared, both ladies in their best out-door attire, followed—yes, followed by the fair, as yet un-named one, in simple morning indoor dress, and no head covering save her chestnut locks, which gleamed golden in the sunlight on her well-poised head. With much care Mrs. Rashleigh arranged herself in the little carriage. Her companion took the reins, and Mrs. Rashleigh, in audible tones, said to the young spectator of this embarkation, "I shall probably not return before five. Be sure you copy those three letters and post them in good time; do not fail." The last words were somewhat indistinct, as the stout pony evidently thought they had kept him long enough, and trotted soberly on of his own accord to an accompaniment of barking from the collie.

"Now is my chance," said Tremaine to himself as he rapidly descended and approached the gate, slackening his pace and reconnoitring his ground, lest the stern old dowager should have forgotten anything and return.

The fates were propitious, and in a few minutes Tremaine rang boldly.

A younger, brighter and less imposing woman came at the summons.

"*Is Mrs. Rashleigh at home?*" asked Tremaine with an air of profound interest.

"Well, no, sir; she has just gone out with Miss Parry, and I don't think she will be in till late, for I think she is gone to Dene Court, and that's a good six miles, you know."

"Oh, yes, exactly. I am sorry. I wanted to see Mrs. Rashleigh particularly—a—might I come in and write a line?"

"Yes, sure, sir. Maybe you'd like to see Miss Carew? she is the only one at home."

"Yes, of course. I could explain things to her, if she will be so good as to admit me."

"I think she will be up by the ruins, sir; I'll just go and see." So saying she walked quickly away down a shrubbery to the left. Tremaine followed, a little amused at his own audacity, and kept her in sight. He soon perceived Miss Carew (he had heard her name at last) sitting on a fragment of stone, several of which lay about, and holding a book in her hand.

When the servant presented Tremaine's card she looked up, laughed, and rose as if to return to the house. Tremaine hastened to meet her. Raising his hat, and bowing low, he exclaimed, "Pray do not let me oblige you to go in. I have ventured to disturb you as I have been disappointed in not finding Mrs. Rashleigh; I particularly wished——"

Here he was interrupted by a laugh—a hearty, natural, but sweet laugh. The servant had disappeared; they were alone. Tremaine paused, his expressive hazel

eyes full of fun and mischief, and no small amount of admiration.

"I most particularly wished to apologize and explain to you," he resumed; when she again interrupted him:

"The fact is, Mr. Tremaine, we owe each other apologies, and I am not sorry to have the opportunity. You must own it was rather wicked of you to pass yourself off as an old friend?"

"But I did not intend—it was all a mistake—and just think of the temptation!"

She shook her head.

"Then you do not guess the truth? Sit down here"—pointing to a rustic seat commanding a fine view up the bend of the river, and placing herself in one corner of it. "I will tell you all about it, only *remember* it is a dead secret!"

"Of course!" cried Tremaine, enchanted with her frank, easy tone.

"Well," she resumed, "I was beginning to despair of having a decent dance—and the music was really good—when I heard some one say just behind me, 'Oh! I'll pretend to recognize her, get up a little talk, and ask her to dance!' Almost immediately you presented yourself; you didn't do it badly, so it flashed across me that I ought to make something of such a situation and have a dance into the bargain. So, just to puzzle you, I pretended to recognize an old friend. Every now and then, when you were growing too comfortable, I invented something else to puzzle you. It was very, very funny, but you were really wonderfully equal to the occasion."

Tremaine laughed good-humouredly. "Then I must

confess I was very considerably sold," he said. "You were rather cruel; if you only knew how I have racked my brain——"

"I never thought about that, and I never thought I should see you again. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I came in last Friday and saw you talking to Miss Parry."

She looked away over the river and the woods beyond—thoughtfully, all the light, the mischievous mockery dying out of her face.

"May I hope that I am forgiven for the audacious attempt to make your acquaintance?" he asked.

"Oh yes, certainly! Why did you not say, 'I cannot find any one to introduce me; will you dance *sans cérémonie?*'?"

"I did not dare, and you would have refused."

"No, I should not; I wanted to dance. Well, Mr. Tremaine, what have you to say to my grandmother?"

"Oh! Mrs. Rashleigh?" He paused and gathered his wits together. "You know she was good enough to say—at least almost to say—we—that is, Major McIntyre and myself—might come here and photograph these very interesting ruins. Now will she be so obliging as to let me know *when* it would be convenient for us to begin operations?"

"Very well! I will ask her."

"Do you think she will object?"

"I haven't the faintest notion what she will do."

"You will put in a good word for us?"

"It would not do you much good, Mr. Tremaine; but I should like you to come, and I should enjoy watching the process—if I may?"

"If you may! why we should be honoured by your notice."

Miss Carew smiled and shook her head.

"The look-out here is charming—what a delightful residence!" said Tremaine.

"Yes, it is very picturesque. Come round by the back"—rising and leading the way past the corner of the house to a narrow strip of emerald-like grass from which the ground sloped steeply, covered for a short way by green sward and then clothed with a thicket of shrubs and evergreens, through which a pathway led to a gate opening on a little rough stone jetty at which was moored a boat.

"A most enviable abode!" exclaimed Tremaine.

"I suppose so. *I* dislike it. Now, Mr. Tremaine, I have a task of letter-writing to accomplish, so I must let you go. If you come round by this end of the house you will be near the gate. Good-bye!"—she held out her hand with a kind, frank smile, meeting his eyes fully.

"Not good-bye! *au revoir!*" cried Tremaine.

"Well, yes; I hope so! I will give your message." And Tremaine found no excuse for lingering.

CHAPTER III.

LOOKING BACK.

SYBIL CAREW stood still for a moment or two, when Tremaine had retired, a sense of having been summarily dismissed contending with his exultation at having so far succeeded.

Her thoughts were exceedingly favourable to the "gay cavalier"—who had just left her with evident reluctance.

"How nice and bright he is!" she said to herself, "I wish he might have stayed. It is so charming to have a *young* companion. Poor dear Ariminta is kind and good, but——! I am a wretch to find fault with her! I don't know how I could *live*, if she were not here, and how on earth could *she* be bright? Now Mr. Tremaine has everything he wants, I suppose—and oh!—how delightful to be a man! Free to go everywhere, and earn one's living anyhow. Why, one might begin by being a stable boy and no one knows where. There is no use in thinking about it. But I am sure Mr. Tremaine would have liked to stay. However, that would not do! I wonder if Mrs. Rashleigh will let him and his friend photograph the ruins—I hope so! What a lovely day! I have half a mind to go away to the woods, but I must copy those tiresome letters first." She ascended the shallow steps which led to the glass

door, at the back of the house; entering, she turned right, down a passage, at the end of which was the staircase and the entrance to a morning-room overlooking the lawn—evidently a much-used apartment.

The furniture was old and shabby, no two articles matched; a small table covered with faded cloth supported a huge work basket overflowing with needle-work; a cottage piano, which had seen better days, stood across a corner; another larger table, with drawers loaded with writing materials, books and papers, was pushed against the seat fixed in one of the two high narrow windows. Yet it was a pleasant room, it had a finely carved oak mantel-piece, and the empty grate was masked by plants; a vase of flowers stood on the writing-table, another on the piano, and the place looked as if it were lived in.

The door by which Sybil entered was on the left of the fire-place, which she passed and opened another similar door on the right. It admitted to a library, looking upon the ruins. This apartment though old-fashioned in its appointments was well kept and handsome; here on an oak writing-table lay three letters and three sheets of paper. Sybil gathered them up with a slight laugh, "No margin for mistakes," she exclaimed, as she went back to the morning-room, where she settled herself at the crowded table, and set to work with careless rapidity that would have made her grandmother's flesh creep.

Unlike though they were, Mrs. Rashleigh was Sybil Carew's mother's mother.

Her family history was not complicated. The dignified Dowager's first husband was a well-born

enthusiastic curate—whom she hoped would make his way into a high position in the Church.

He proved, however, unworthy of his practical partner, and adopted far-fetched views, which barred his upward and onward progress. Finally, he caught fever while “slumming” in the worst district he could find, and instead of dying off as the majority of right-minded men would, he lingered on in a most reprehensible and costly manner, till his only child, a daughter, was blooming into fairest womanhood; she had grown up so different from her mother that the servants said, she must have been changed at nurse.

Though comparatively poor the enthusiastic curate was not penniless, and his widow, who had a genius for finance, took care not to be unprovided for a rainy day.

She was ambitious, still handsome, still young, for she possessed that famous preservative against wear and tear—“*Mauvais cœur, bonne digestion.*” Moreover, she managed to present a decent appearance.

At a south coast watering place she met Mr. Rashleigh, a retired widowed Indian civilian, with a liver and a boy—both bothered him exceedingly.

The quiet, sensible, handsome widow was a sort of godsend to the sufferer. She, too, got into trouble about this time. Her fair daughter had been asked in marriage by a wealthy, horsey stockbroker, and was so mad, so undutiful, as to prefer a handsome smooth-tongued Irishman, who possessed landed property that yielded him a bare existence. The poor girl believed in her mother’s relentless power. She was wildly afraid of being forced into a detested marriage, and to escape

she fled with her lover. The mother simply wiped her out of the book of her remembrance, married Mr. Rashleigh, and went to breathe the purer air of county society at Lynchester.

She proved a real treasure to her second husband, and quite a tender mother to his big-boned, silent, self-willed boy, who became very good friends with his father's wife.

Sybil was the only child of Mrs. Rashleigh's runaway daughter. She had no recollection of her young mother, who only survived her birth a few years. Her father never married again. He had loved his wife passionately, tenderly, and possessed the feminine strain so often to be met with in Irishmen, which makes them such charming, sympathetic companions—such impractical and readily despondent men. He loved the country, he loved sport, he liked the familiar faces round him; so he dawdled on, growing poorer and poorer.

When he could not keep hunters, he took more keenly to shooting. When he could not pay gamekeepers he became a persevering fisherman. Little Sybil thrived in health and strength—her father's idol, petted and spoiled by all around her, and would have been as wild as a mountain goat, but for the friendly care of a certain Mrs. Verner. This lady was the wife of a relation, who, as is often the case in Ireland, was agent for the estate.

When Sybil was about five or six, this gentleman died, leaving his family but poorly provided for. The children, a boy and two girls, were still young; and the mother, a thoughtful cultivated English woman, under-

took her daughters' education herself. In these lessons little Sybil shared.

Carew would have gladly maintained the whole family, had he the wherewithal; unable to do this, he insisted on their continuing to occupy, rent-free, the comfortable abode which had been the agent's residence, with the use of the larger part of whatever fell to the landlord's rod or gun. Indeed he enjoyed ministering by all the means in his power to the comfort of his kinsman's family.

Ignorant of the difficulties which oppressed their seniors, the happy healthful years flew swiftly by to the three children. Mrs. Verner had recovered the crushing sense of sorrow and loneliness which long oppressed her. Her boy promised to be a credit and a joy, and a relative of her own, settled in Australia, offered him a berth on his cattle station, when this phase of Sybil's fortunes was closed by the death of her father.

Another Carew inherited after him. Mrs. Verner had no longer a home rent-free. Her son was off her hands, and she determined to take her daughters to France to procure higher educational advantages than they had yet known. But what was to become of Sybil? She was penniless and unprotected.

Mrs. Rashleigh made no reply to Mrs. Verner's application and to part with the child was impossible, unless for some safe guardianship; so Mrs. Verner for the present adopted the little orphan.

The next change was the marriage of Mrs. Verner's eldest girl, and a request from her son who had succeeded beyond her hopes, that she and his unmarried sister would come and make a home for themselves and

him in "our Antipodes." The question what to do with Sybil again became very puzzling. Mrs. Rashleigh was once more appealed to and this time answered favourably.

She was now again a widow, but well dowered and left guardian to her step-son. He had entered the army and happened to be at home on leave when Mrs. Verner's letter came.

Mrs. Rashleigh, in her annoyance, spoke to him of the audacity of these "beggarly Irish people."

To her surprise he took an entirely different view of the case, and his views were always important in her eyes.

"What are you going to do with the poor little devil? You can't throw her on her parish. Your best and cheapest place would be to give her the run of the house here; a girl doesn't want much education, and by-and-by she'll be of use to you."

Seeing which way the wind of her step-son's opinions blew, Mrs. Rashleigh, whose deference to him was great, sent a coldly-worded invitation to her granddaughter, and so Sybil became an inmate of the Priory House, when little more than fourteen.

The bitter desolation of that miserable time was deeply graven on the tablets of her memory.

Fortunately relief came. Either Mrs. Rashleigh did not care to have Sybil in her sight, or Brian Rashleigh suggested school. But to school she was sent, a third-rate cheap school in London. Here she was not ill taught, nor unhappy.

When she resumed her residence at the Priory, she was no longer passionately miserable, but she felt much

older and much less inclined to see bright visions beckoning to her out of the vague future.

While the reader has skimmed this long retrospect Sybil has been writing, not very diligently; she often paused to look away over the fair scene which stretched out before her; sometimes she sang the waltz to which she had danced with Tremaine, tapping her fingers in time to it on the table. Then she had to "scratch out" every now and then, but the letters got done at last. Sybil folded them length-ways, after the fashion approved by her grandmother, and put them under a paper weight. Then she went upstairs, put on her hat, and sallied forth, passing under the arch opposite the house and along the lane to the post-office.

Thence she made her way by a narrow winding street between high-gabled houses into Bridge Street, one of the main thoroughfares, and passed through the Bridge Gate, which was the south-east port of the city. Turning left, she followed a narrow road along the riverside till she reached a very old partially decayed wooden landing-place, from whence a ferry-boat plied to the opposite side. This curious square-looking craft was, at the moment of her approach, taking in cargo and passengers; several hampers tied on a hand-barrow in charge of a boy, a refractory pig, "personally conducted" by a man in corduroy, old women with bundles, a girl or two with baskets.

The "ancient mariner" who guided the ferry-boat postponed his start for a moment, till Sybil arrived, and touched his forelock as she stepped into the boat. In a few minutes they were at the other side, and with a friendly word of enquiry for Charon's rheumatism, to

which he replied that it was "a deal easier since the warm weather had come at last," Sybil had left the ferry and ascended a short but steep bank overgrown by gorse and brambles, following a path which led across a strip of common intervening between the old high road to Freightsborough and the Bobingham woods, which here throw out an advance guard in the form of scattered beech and elm trees, almost to the little landing place. These woods, which covered many acres, sloped gently upwards, forming a pleasant foreground to the scene visible from the Priory and backed by a range of blue hills.

The river formed the north-east boundary of the Bobingham territory, running comparatively straight for a considerable distance till it met the sudden height on which the city was built and swept round its base in the fine bend above described.

A few yards from the ferry the path bifurcated; Sybil struck into that on the left and was soon under the shade of the outlying trees, and walked briskly for ten or fifteen minutes into the thicker portion of the wood. Then she slackened her pace, gathering leaves and ferns as she went, till she reached a spot where the underwood divided and the gravelly margin of the river rose gradually from the water. Here she sat down on the prostrate trunk of a tree and began to tie the leaves together with some long grass; presently she put them down and sat in meditation, her hands clasped round her knees, her eyes fixed on the swift flowing water.

In this mood her young face looked infinitely sad; her mouth, which, though well formed, was not small,

had a slightly pathetic droop, but there was no suspicion of tears in her dark grey eyes.

“Why,” she was saying to herself, “why does my grandmother dislike me? Why does she seem ashamed of me? Why does she always leave me out of everything she possibly can? It will be awfully dull at Dene Court this afternoon I daresay, but I do not like being left at home. Perhaps, perhaps I was not asked! Very probably—but why not? I am not unpresentable, I am as much a gentlewoman as any of them. I suspect the Rashleighs were peasants when the Carews were knights—not that *that* is of much consequence. Why does Mrs. Rashleigh dislike me? She is ice and iron to me. I am sure she cannot bear me to be in the room with her, or to see me, or to hear my voice. She would be pleased if I were dead. Well, I shall not oblige her—I shall live. Time must bring changes, and any change would be better than the present. I wonder if cousin Verner will ever come back, or if I shall ever go to her? It would be too much joy. I am afraid they forget me. Well, I can never forget her, nor Lucy, nor Harriet. How good they all were! Perhaps if I were happier I should not think so much about them. I wonder if there ever was another woman like Mrs. Rashleigh? And to owe *her* everything—what I eat and drink and what I put on—little as the last is. Well, in about two years I shall be of age, then I shall go away, no one shall keep me here. I hate my grandmother. Do I?—do I really hate her? No, I believe I don’t care enough for her to hate her, only now and then for a few minutes, when she makes me feel what a wretched burden I am. It is a shame to think of such discordant irritating

things in these sweet woods. How deliciously the birds are singing, and I came to think about my naughty children." She drew forth a note-book and pencil and began scribbling, then she paused, thought for a minute, and burst into a laugh—a laugh so fresh, so joyous, that it seemed impossible that hatred, or sorrow, or any of the evil crew, their followers, could harbour in the heart from whence it came.

"That will be lovely," she said half aloud. "Minty will be enchanted with the idea! How much more interesting naughty children are than good ones."

Here the sound of a rather heavy tread interrupted her musings, and the figure of a stout man clad in dark velveteen, with a gun on his shoulder, made its way through the trees behind her. She half turned, but did not stir from her seat.

"Beg pardon, miss," said the gamekeeper, "but I just caught a glimpse o' ye, and I made so bold as to come along to speak t' ye."

"I am very pleased to see you, Evans," she returned. "How is Mrs. Evans, and Ju?"

"The missis is all right, thank ye, but Ju had a bad turn last night—she fancied the bull was a chasing of her again—and we couldn't quiet her noways. Maybe you'd be so kind as to come round to-morrow or next day?"

"Yes I will, Evans. I had better come as late as I can and tell her some pretty story before she goes to sleep. I will ask Miss Parry to come with me."

"Thank ye kindly, miss! and I'll see you safe back to the ferry after."

"I wish I could go now," resumed Sybil, "but I did not say where I was going, and I dare not stay."

"No—sure, miss!"

"Evans—can you tell me what o'clock it is?"

Evans, an honest-looking fellow, with a broad face and dark hair already powdered with grey, drew forth a ponderous silver watch. "It's gone half-past six, miss!"

"Then I must go back as fast as I can," cried Sybil, starting up. "Does your little girl eat better?"

"Well no, not much better. She and her mother will be main glad to see you whenever you can come, miss."

"I am almost sure I can come to-morrow. Good-bye!" and Sybil walked briskly away towards the ferry.

Mrs. Rashleigh and Miss Parry, however, had arrived before her—that was of small importance.

Whether Sybil was late or early, punctual or unpunctual, never affected Mrs. Rashleigh. To be sure the solemnity of late dinner was unknown, save on state occasions at the Priory. A one o'clock meal; tea and bread and butter was the system at six, followed by a crust and a cup of milk, if any further refreshment was needed before retiring to rest. On days like the present, when tea was provided at some one else's expense, none was served at home, save for the individual who had not shared the outdoor hospitality.

Sybil therefore found her tea tray set in the morning room, and on it one cup, a plate of bread and butter—and joy! another of those neat round potato cakes—almost the only dainty cook dared to provide surreptitiously.

Miss Parry, who had already removed her best bonnet and cloak, and replaced her best gown with her everyday black alpaca, was sitting in the unblocked window seat, with an exhausted air.

"Have you been long in?" asked Sybil, taking off her hat. "Oh! isn't cook a dear to make potato cakes! Do ask for a cup, Minty, and have some tea with me. I must take those letters to Mrs. Rashleigh first, and I have a message for her."

So saying Sybil took the copies she had made and ran upstairs with them.

The lady of the house had a sitting-room next her bedchamber, where she spent the greater part of her time, descending at unexpected intervals to examine every corner and cranny, and pounce with relentless grasp upon delinquencies and delinquents.

The interview did not last long.

"Thank goodness, that is over!" said Sybil, sitting down and lifting the cosy from the tea-pot. "I do believe she will let them photograph the ruins."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Parry.

"Oh, I will tell you all about it. There is only enough for one cup each in the tea-pot; if I put in any more water it will cease to be tea; but there is a tolerable allowance of milk." Then Sybil proceeded to describe Tremaine's visit.

Miss Parry was quite fluttered by the romantic possibilities suggested by such an unusual event.

"And what did Mrs. Rashleigh say, dear?"

"She said she would make you write to Mr. Tremaine. I do hope they will come; he is so nice and bright, and I am sure he did want to stay."

"But, my dear, you must be very prudent, and——"

"Certainly not, Araminta; I intend to be *imprudent*, and to enjoy myself."

CHAPTER IV.

PHOTOGRAPHY.

"THERE is a note for Mrs. Rashleigh, with a bugle and rifle rangers round it on the envelope," said Sybil one morning, a few days after the interview just described.

"It will be from Mr. Tremaine," returned Miss Parry, who was selecting those for the lady of the house from among several letters just arrived by the first post. "Your grandmamma wrote to him yesterday—or was it the day before? This is, I suppose, to thank her for permitting him and his friend to photograph the ruins."

"They cannot come to-day," exclaimed Sybil; "it is dull and inclined to drizzle," and she gazed regretfully through the window of the dining-room.

"There is an Indian letter, too," continued Miss Parry. "It is nearly six weeks since Captain Rashleigh wrote. Your grandmamma *will* be pleased; they are quite fond of each other."

"Birds of a feather," said Sybil. "Here, Minty, here is another; that is from Mrs. Winter; and these two look like invitations."

Miss Parry carefully arranged the cocoa, roll and butter, of which Mrs. Rashleigh's breakfast invariably

consisted, on a tray, and placed the letters beside the little sugar basin, while Sybil rang for the parlour-maid, and then sat down to her own tea and toast without any apparent expectation of a letter for herself.

"Well, this must be some mistake!" exclaimed Miss Parry, looking up in evident surprise from a business-like letter on bluish paper. This is from 'Jack and Jill' office. It says the editor is willing to accept the sketch entitled 'Never Break Your Word!' Proofs will be sent shortly, and he will be obliged by their prompt return. I never wrote anything."

"Oh, you dear, darling old Minty!" cried Sybil, starting up and hugging her vehemently. "No, of course you didn't, but *I* did! I was so audacious as to use your name! I intended to tell you, and ask pardon and your leave, but I did not like to let you know in case no notice was taken of my poor little paper. Let me have the delightful letter. Think of what I have written appearing in print! What a dear, delightful man!"

"Who? What *are* you talking about, my dear?" exclaimed the bewildered Araminta.

"I will tell you all about it," cried Sybil excitedly. "They take that new child's magazine, 'Jack and Jill,' at the Price's. I read it sometimes to Jim and Lottie. It struck me I could write as well as some of the contributors, so when poor little Ju Evans was chased by the bull, I invented a sort of story about it. Of course I made out that she had promised not to go by a certain path, and broke her word, and all that sort of thing, and I was nearly a month doing it, for I wrote it three times over. Then I sent it to 'Jack and Jill'—"

Oh! a long time ago. I was so wicked as to give *your* name and address!—you don't mind, do you, dear?—and now that angel of an editor is going to print it. You will forgive me, Minty?"

"Yes, dear, of course I will. But pray am I to pocket the money if he pays?"

"That is another matter! I am going to make a lot of money in the next two years, and indeed, Minty dear, you are welcome to some of it. You must know I have been trying to write a story—well, it is all but finished, and it is quite long. Poor Mrs. Price little knows when she tells me how good I am to help her with the children, what splendid materials I gather among her rather troublesome flock. I have put them all into this story! Oh! I will read it to you, Minty—it is ever so much longer than this thing. Suppose I can make some money! Won't it be heavenly!"

"It will indeed, dear. But, Sybil, I think you ought to tell your grandmother. She would be so proud——"

"Nonsense, Minty! She has no right to my confidence, and she shall not have it. Now, tell me, dear, do you forgive me for taking your name in vain, and may I go on taking it? And will you be silent as the grave respecting my great expectations?"

"I will indeed, dear. You may depend upon me, and I am proud, not to say delighted, to think you have succeeded. Now do sit down and eat your breakfast. I wonder how much you will get for it?"

"Ah, so do I. I heard Mr. Price once saying that stories are paid by the page—the printed page. Suppose

I got two pounds! It would be lovely! How wonderful it will be to see my scribblings in print," exclaimed Sybil, as she sat down again to her breakfast, placing the editor's letter beside her in order to refresh herself with occasional glances at its contents.

Some wild castle-building on Sybil's part prolonged the morning meal, and made her good friend feel quite dizzy with the unwonted excitement. At last the clock struck the half-hour, and Miss Parry started up in alarm. "Your grandmamma will wonder what has become of me. Do put away the sugar and marmalade, Sybil. I will come down as soon as I know what is to be done to-day. I wish it would clear up; I want so much to see about a summer bonnet," she said, and hastily left the room.

When Miss Parry descended from Mrs. Rashleigh's apartments (a bedroom and sitting-room where that lady spent a great deal of her time), she informed Sybil that Mrs. Winter's note was an invitation for her to join a small party of young people at her house on the Tuesday.

"And am I to go?" asked Sybil.

"Yes, dear, and your grandmamma very kindly wishes me to see that your clothes are in proper order. I am not exactly authorised to get you new things, but——"

"To repair my rags!" put in Sybil, laughing. "Never mind, we will see what can be done with my old black grenadine, for the pretty dress dear Mrs. Winter gave me is quite too fine."

How sweet and bright are the hopes, the aspirations of youth. How boundless the edifices upreared on the

bubble foundation of airy imagination. For the moment Sybil was uplifted over the depressing influence of her helpless dependence on her adamantine grandmother. She would emancipate herself—she would save up her golden pennies when she had them and sail away to join her beloved relations beneath the Southern Cross. She would live, really live and enjoy, and finally meet Prince Charming, with whom she would dwell happily in fairyland ever after!

In the afternoon the misty rainfall ceased, and Sybil accompanied Miss Parry to do some shopping, and as they went she, with blushes and hesitations, asked, "Would you mind buying a 'Jack and Jill,' Minty dear? It costs sixpence, but I do so want to have a copy and see how much there is in a page. I will pay you when I get my money! Hasn't it a delightful sound?"

"Of course I will. We can call at Parker's on our way back and get one. Don't you think you ought to have a new pair of gloves?" &c., &c., &c.

What a busy happy evening ensued, counting the number of words in the printed page and ascertaining how many of her own pages went to the total.

Then she had to answer the editor's letter and promise strict attention to his wishes. How sweet are the first gleams of hope—the first dawn of independence!

The next morning dawned bright and unclouded. Shortly after luncheon the Dene Court equipage presented itself at the Priory gates, and Lady Elisabeth Rashleigh was duly announced.

Dene Court was the family place of the Rashleighs, and the residence of John Rashleigh, Esq., brother-in-

law of Sybil's grandmother. With the head of her late husband's family Mrs. Rashleigh had always been careful to keep on the most friendly terms; moreover, she had furthered by all the means in her power Lady Elizabeth's scheme to wed her only child Aline (whose sex forbid her succeeding to the family estates) with Brian Rashleigh, who was the next heir. There was a constant interchange of civilities between the Court and the Priory, by which Mrs. Rashleigh largely profited, while to the owners of the Court she presented the semblance of the stateliest and most beneficent of old ladies. At Christmas and on birthday anniversaries she even relaxed her purse strings, and gave pretty though not costly souvenirs to the daughter of the house.

On the present occasion Lady Elizabeth had called to take Mrs. Rashleigh on a round of distant visits, and although she expected her sister-in-law, the venerable lady was not quite ready. Sybil happened to be crossing the hall as Lady Elizabeth entered, and was caught.

"Good morning, Miss Carew," said her ladyship, a stout, light-coloured woman of middle age, who had little in her aspect to denote descent from a long line of earls, and was only saved from utter commonplace by a certain refinement of voice and that indescribable decision and assurance of manner arising from the consciousness from childhood of high social rank. "I hope Mrs. Rashleigh is pretty well."

"Quite well, I believe, Lady Elizabeth. I have not seen her this morning. Will you not come into the drawing-room? My grandmother will be down directly."

"Thank you," and Lady Elizabeth rolled as if on castors into that sacred apartment.

"Lovely day, isn't it? Aline is riding with her father, or she would have come with me. Are you going to the tennis party at the Deanery?"

"No, I am not."

"You are rather a recluse, I fancy. Mrs. Rashleigh tells me you don't care for society. Do you go in for art, or ritualism?"

"Neither, Lady Elizabeth."

"Then I do hope you haven't taken up those dreadful evangelicals—you might as well be a dissenter at once. And I am sure I saw you with a whole tribe of Mr. Price's children crossing the common near Brookland one day last week. Now no one can well be lower than Mr. Price."

"Yes; I am very often with the Price children, but that does not dispose me to agree with their father's opinions," cried Sybil. "Whatever else they may be, you cannot find nicer, kinder people than Mr. and Mrs. Price!"

"Perhaps not in your experience! but, my dear child, I am by no means sure that your dear grandmother quite approves of your intimacy in that quarter."

"She never told me so," said Sybil calmly.

"Perhaps not; but you should exercise tact—tact is really all-important. Ah! good morning, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh," as the door was opened by that lady in her best "go-to-meeting" array. "Very glad to see you looking so well. If you are quite ready we will start at once; we have a long drive before us. Good morning, Miss Carew; you must really come over and

have tea with Aline, in her own den, some day next week; you and that good creature, Miss Parry. Mr. Rashleigh and I are going for two or three days to the Charltons, and Aline will be quite alone. You will permit her, will you not, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh?"

"Thank you," said Sybil.

"You are really too good," returned her grandmother, with a deep sigh, as if Sybil was too ill-disposed to accept the friendly advances of those whose society would be of advantage to her.

"Ah!" said Lady Elizabeth, with a playful shake of her rather ponderous head, "I suspect you are a self-willed puss."

Sybil smiled; then both ladies rustled away, the carriage door was banged, and the big horses scattered the clay and gravel about as they started off on their day's work.

Sybil waltzed down the hall and entered the morning-room, where Miss Parry sat darning a table cloth.

"They are gone, thank goodness; gone for the whole afternoon. Come, Minty, it is quite heavenly; take something less enormous than that monstrous piece of work, and come out into the sweet soft air. I will read you some of my story. I want your opinion, which means I want you to praise it; I know you will, and I shall believe you to be the soundest critic in the world."

"That will be delightful," exclaimed the obedient Araminta, beginning to fold up her table cloth. "Did you see Lady Elizabeth?"

Sybil nodded.

"Well, I am glad you looked so nice. Why, you have your second best dress on, and your hair is beau-

tifully done—a rose at your waist, too! You are quite smart!”

“Of course I am, Minty, dear. Hasn’t my gran’ma given permission to my pleasant cavalier to enter our enchanted walls—not hall? Isn’t it a sunshiny morning favorable to photography? Hence these garments! Learn, oh Minty mine, to put two and two together!”

“Sybil, my love, you are too silly.”

“You know the fate of a bow that is never unstrung? Come, we are losing precious minutes,” unlocking a drawer and taking out several closely written sheets sewn together in a very unorthodox inexperienced manner. “We will sit on some of the stones near the ruins and see what will happen.”

Miss Parry armed herself with a piece of embroidery, ultimately intended for Sybil’s benefit, and listened with astonished delight to the opening pages of a very simple story, detailing the joys, tribulations, errors and struggles of a party of children presided over by a gentle widowed mother and a fidgety imperious devoted nurse.

Sybil, however, had not read long before the bell rang loudly, and soon Stone, the parlour-maid, was seen conducting two gentlemen—one tall, gaunt and no longer young; the other, Tremaine himself, followed by a man in undress livery carrying the photographic apparatus.

“You see,” said Tremaine, who looked radiant after the first salutations were exchanged, “we have lost no time in availing ourselves of Mrs. Rashleigh’s kind permission. Let me present my friend, Major MacIntyre—Miss Parry, Miss Carew. I am so glad you happen

to be at home. Your advice as to what is considered the best view of these charming ruins will be invaluable."

The Major raised his hat with solemn politeness.

"I should think the artist himself must be the best judge of the point of view," said Sybil, with a pleasant smile.

"You're right," replied the Major; "though a humble mechanic, as I consider myself, has small claim to the title of artist. I think we will just walk round and have a good look before we begin."

"By all means." And Sybil attached herself to Major MacIntyre, rather provokingly, Tremaine thought.

"Hum—deuced fine remnant of an east window. What may be the date of this old place?"

"Ah! I am afraid to commit myself," said Sybil, "but, if tradition is to be believed, the priory must have been in full swing in the eleventh century, for, according to the legend generally believed here, Harold (the last of the Saxon kings) did *not* die at Hastings. He was saved and healed of his wounds; finally he escaped to this priory and ended his days here as a monk."

"Hum—ha! a peaceful ending," returned MacIntyre carelessly.

"An ignominious ending," added Sybil. "Harold, if he were the man history and Bulwer Lytton represent him to be, could have known no peace while the Norman tyrant was triumphant."

"Perhaps not," said the Major, looking at her a little more attentively. "Anyhow, it was a pleasant spot to rest in."

"What a handsome collie, Miss Carew," broke in Tremaine, who was growing impatient of her neglect.

Oscar had submitted to the presence of the strangers with dignified equanimity, having sniffed suspiciously at the Major's servant, and now walked between Sybil and MacIntyre with solemn watchfulness.

"Yes, he is a dear," she said, stroking him; "but he is not quite thoroughbred. His deficiency in some race characteristics nearly cost him his life; but I saved him—did I not, dear old doggie?"

Oscar pressed his head against her, but condescendingly permitted Tremaine to pat him.

"Wonderfully intelligent creatures, are they not?" he observed. "I really believe they have a sort of affectionate instinctive perception that leaves mere reason far behind."

"Ah! Mr. Tremaine; Oscar is listening. He is half alive to a doubt that you are flattering him, yet would like to believe! Praise is so sweet! He is inclined to make friends with you—a high tribute to your merits!"

"He is such a well-behaved dog," put in Miss Parry.

"Good behaviour is one characteristic of a noble nature," said Tremaine seriously.

"I'll take the window first," exclaimed MacIntyre, who had been gazing at it. "That, with a bit of those arches to the left, ought to make a nice picture. Here, Jackson!"

His servant quickly obeyed, and, after dodging about for a few minutes, the Major decided on a point of view, and finally fixed the camera. Tremaine stood by the case of slides to hand them to him when wanted.

Miss Parry and Sybil, to say nothing of Oscar, looked on with profound interest; but at the critical moment, when MacIntyre, stooping to the level of the camera, converted himself into a "bogie man" with the indispensable black cloth, Oscar could stand it no longer. From the first he had had dark suspicions of the Major's man, nor was he particularly taken with the Major himself, but when he beheld him directing this diabolical machine against his beloved young mistress and shrouding himself in the sombre drapery aforesaid, he felt the moment for decisive action had come; with a fierce growl he flew at the offender and seized the black cloth with his teeth.

"Call off the brute," cried Major MacIntyre. "I had just got it beautifully."

"Oscar—Oscar! You naughty dog!" exclaimed Sybil, running to catch his collar. "You are all wrong. It is a friend, Oscar; you must be quiet. Will you behave properly, or must I take you away?"

The creature looked up to her in the most deprecating way, as if he would say, "Forgive me, if I made a mistake!"

"I think he had better be shut up, for any disturbance is fatal," said the Major.

"Very well," returned Sybil; "I will take him away." And, still holding his collar, she walked quickly towards the stables.

"Oscar is truly human in his dislike to what he does not understand!" said Tremaine, who ventured to accompany her.

"Poor fellow! he will be so vexed at being shut up," she replied. "Never mind, Oscar; I will take

you for a nice long walk after." Oscar barked approvingly.

"Do you ever walk? Do you ever stir beyond these sacred precincts, Miss Carew?"

"Yes, of course I do! I am a *great* pedestrian."

"Where do you go? I have rambled in every direction, trying to find you, but in vain. You know I want a heap of explanation still."

"What, from me? I have told you everything."

"Perhaps so; but—but—*why* can I never see you or meet you anywhere?"

Sybil laughed. "Do you want to meet me?" she asked, turning to give him a distracting look from her speaking eyes.

"Yes—above everything! beyond everything!"

She laughed again, and then unlatched and opened the gate into the stable yard.

"There, go in, good dog! Yes, you must! Go in, Oscar!" and Oscar obeyed. She stepped back and closed the door.

"You are very good," she said, not at all embarrassed by his *empressement*. "I rarely go into the town except early in the day; but come round this way, and I will show you how I avoid the street."

"You certainly have a charming view here," exclaimed Tremaine, as Sybil paused on the slip of lawn at the back. "The woods and distant hills, with the fine bend of the river, are most picturesque."

"Yes, the woods are lovely. I enjoy them even in winter! You see that path there to the left? That leads down through the thicket to a gate on the edge of the river. It opens on a little road quite near the

ferry; and when Miss Parry and I want a nice walk we cross the ferry and ramble through the woods. There is a pretty foot-bridge about two miles higher up, where the river is narrower, and a pleasant road by cornfields and a village to the Foregate."

"Do you often walk there?"

"Yes; very often," she returned, gazing away over the scene before her as if her thoughts were absent.

"There must be good shooting in the Bobingham preserves," said Tremaine.

"I believe there is—and further on, beyond the bridge, there is a trout stream."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Tremaine; and then he stood silent, as if in profound thought. "And do you never go to the cathedral? The music is really very good," he added.

"Oh, yes; I go very often, and I sometimes see *you* there!"

"Do you? Why, how is it I do not see you? I have looked out for you."

"I sit with Mrs. Winter beyond the Bishop's throne; and I go through a little door near the lady chapel that strangers know nothing about. So you would never meet me among the rest of the congregation. But I love the cathedral! Some of my happiest moments are spent there!"

"There is something mysterious about you, Miss Carew. You are so rarely visible—there is a sort of dim difficulty enfolding you," said Tremaine.

Sybil laughed, a joyous mocking laugh. "Are you imaginative? Do you fancy me a bewitched princess, under the power of a wicked fairy?" she asked.

"Not bewitched—but decidedly bewitching!" The colour came to his brown cheek as he spoke, fearing his words might be too free; yet he could not keep them back.

Sybil made him a curtsy. "That is a charming compliment, Mr. Tremaine. I do not hear anything half so fine every day here, except from Mr. Winter; so——"

"Winter!" he interrupted eagerly. "Are you going to Mrs. Winter on the 15th?"

"I am, for a wonder."

"Ah! Then at last there is a chance of another dance."

"I hope so," returned Sybil. "Now let us see how the photographer is going on. I am longing to see how the old Priory comes out. You must ask Major MacIntyre to give me one for my own self."

"Why, of course he will!"

"Perhaps not; he does not look very amiable."

"Why, MacIntyre is as good a fellow as ever lived. We are great allies." They moved on as they spoke, and found the Major putting in fresh slides, in order to take other views, and Miss Parry busy with her embroidery, her countenance expressive of serene satisfaction.

"Well! how are you getting on?" asked Tremaine.

"Eh! I'm not sure—the light is a little troublesome. I'm going to try that archway with the beech tree just behind it;" and they discussed the best position for some minutes, while Sybil, approaching Miss Parry, said in a low tone and an accent of entreaty,

"Minty, dear! don't you *think* we might offer them some tea?"

"I am not sure what Mrs. Rashleigh would say. I—I'm afraid she would not be pleased, as she said nothing about it."

"But it is so dreadfully inhospitable—I will take the blame. Shall I go and ask cook?"

"Ask them first, Sybil. Perhaps they do not want any."

"Yes, they do, Minty; nice men always like tea. Mr. Winter loves it. You ask Major MacIntyre."

"Well, dear, I feel very uncertain. I——"

Sybil settled the question. "When you have finished this photograph, Major MacIntyre," she said, "you will want some tea."

"Tea? No, thank you. I never touch tea! and I am sorry to say, I must leave this interesting work, as I have an engagement at the barracks. I hope I have succeeded pretty well. If so, perhaps Mrs. Rashleigh will permit me to come again?"

"I am sure she will." No reply from the Major, who disappeared under his black covering.

"Perhaps you would be kind enough to let me through your garden gate to the river side?" asked Tremaine. "I want to explore the ferry and the woods beyond."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Parry. "It is a nice walk; or you may go along by the common and out on the Freightsborough road. The gorse is so sweet, and the grass so fresh just now."

The Major having completed all he could do that morning, and having packed up his belongings, took leave of the ladies.

"I can't say how much obliged I am, Miss Carew. Quite a treat to get such a chance! Delightful place!"

Wonderfully fine outlook! My compliments to Mrs. Rashleigh. I hope she will let me experiment another time. Hey, Tremaine! Not coming with me?"

"I want to cross the ferry," said Tremaine, "and Miss Carew will perhaps be so good as to let me out by the gate below there."

"Oh, very well; I'm off."

Good-days exchanged, Tremaine wandered round the ruins once more, talking frankly and sympathetically with both ladies. Then they released Oscar from "durance vile," and that intelligent quadruped showed many indications of friendly feeling towards his mistress's new friend.

Finally, Miss Parry and Sybil escorted him to the river gate, where he bade them a lingering farewell.

"Till the 15th, I suppose?" he said. "There is not much chance of my seeing you till Mrs. Winter's party."

"No, I suppose not," said Sybil with a smile and a nod, and the rugged, sun-blistered old door closed upon him.

"Well, I must say that Mr. Tremaine is an extremely nice gentleman-like young man," said Miss Parry heartily. "So pleasant and polite; not like the ordinary kind, who are too stiff and conceited to have a word to say for themselves."

"Yes, he is nice; I like him very much," returned Sybil thoughtfully. "How old do you think he is, Minty?"

"I imagine, not more than six or seven and twenty."

"So much? To me, he seems younger than myself. That is because he is a man, and free. I wish *I* were

a man—even a poor man! But perhaps I have the means of independence in my hand. Come, we will have *our* tea, and then I will read you some more of my story. You really like it, Minty?”

“I think it perfectly wonderful!” said Miss Parry, with solemn conviction.

CHAPTER V.

MRS. WINTER'S DANCE.

It would give a very false impression of Sybil Carew if she were represented as being loftily indifferent to the expected dance at Mrs. Winter's.

Far from being in such a superior frame of mind, she pictured the joys of the coming festivity very vividly indeed, and exercised much ingenuity in renovating and decorating an already frequently-worn dress of the "demi-toilette" order.

That Sybil was not more generally sought after, invited and appreciated, puzzled her attached friend and admirer, Miss Parry, immensely. She was well aware, though she would never admit it to Sybil, that Mrs. Rashleigh greatly objected to any attention being bestowed upon her granddaughter. It seemed as if notice of Miss Carew was an affront to her.

The intense antagonism of two natures so diametrically different had hardened in the strong imperious old woman's mind into a dislike so bitter that, as Sybil sometimes said, more in jest than earnest, it seemed her mere existence was an unpardonable offence—some instinctive consciousness told Mrs. Rashleigh that, although she was a penniless dependent, she could never enslave or conquer her granddaughter. Yet, when she first came to dwell under her roof, the child

—she was little more—tried to be pleasant and useful, and really longed to feel grateful. Mrs. Rashleigh soon succeeded in petrifying all such genial tendencies by the icy coldness, the elaborately-displayed indifference, with which she fenced herself against all approach.

She did not find fault, she never warmed into anger, but she contrived to convey a profound impression of contemptuous enmity. *From* the first, Mrs. Rashleigh contrived to convey the idea to her associates that poor Sybil was a terrible handful.

Unfortunately, Sybil herself, proud, mortified, wounded, played her grandmother's game for her. She did not choose to be condescended to and patronized by the gorgeous duchesses and right reverend dames who occasionally met her in Mrs. Rashleigh's drawing-room. She was cool and haughty, and succeeded perfectly in earning the character of "a very self-sufficient, unsociable, unamiable young person indeed, who must be a great trial to poor dear Mrs. Rashleigh," the usual conclusion of any gossip respecting her.

To this general judgment there were two exceptions—the rich banker's and the poor curate's wives. Neither was important enough in Mrs. Rashleigh's eyes to be worth influencing to Sybil's disadvantage. Later, indeed, Mrs. Rashleigh rather encouraged Sybil's intimacy with Mrs. Winter.

That lady had a nephew, a prosperous unmarried nephew, established in Freightsborough, but often staying in Lynchester, who might possibly relieve Mrs. Rashleigh of her incubus, and remove Sybil to the vulgarity and prosperity of the great seaport.

The intervening days went fast. Besides a little

additional needlework, Sybil had the happy task of correcting her first proofs, and the very day of Mrs. Winter's dance she received a copy of the magazine containing her contribution, and received the fruits thereof in the shape of a lovely slip of lilac paper bearing the magic words, "Pay Miss A. Parry or order 'Three pounds ten shillings,' " &c., &c.

"Isn't it splendid, Minty dear—isn't it quite splendid?" cried the excited recipient. "If they pay so much for this short thing, why, they will give ten or twelve pounds for the story; it is four times as long already, and I have a great deal more to write! Just think of twelve pounds; it is a fortune! You will go and get the money to-day, won't you, Minty dear?"

"Yes, certainly," returned Araminta, with much gravity, "and pocket it after, for of course it is mine!"

"I am not much afraid of you, you dear old thing. I'll tell you what I shall do—I shall put away the three pounds and keep the ten shillings in my pocket. Just think of me with ten shillings in my pocket."

"Well, Sybil, I think a great deal more of being an impostor. I know I shall turn all colours when I ask for the money at Mr. Winter's bank."

"What nonsense, Minty! You know I am only a minor as yet, and you are my guardian—the only friend and guardian I have," kissing her heartily—"so of course you ought to receive my money and pass it on. Do you think the bank clerks notice where the cheques come from?"

"You ought to assume some name or initial, Sybil, to sign your compositions by, so as to identify them

hereafter. Give me that cheque; I must sign my name across it at the back."

"Here is a regular printed receipt for me to fill up—I feel immensely important."

It was "a great day entoirly," as Sybil's compatriots would say, and when she had gone through the thrilling experience of accompanying Miss Parry to the bank, of seeing the four beautiful gold pieces shovelled across the counter, and changing the smallest of them into silver, requesting a good many sixpences, she felt that the future had some possibilities of happiness—that the day might come when she should escape the refrigerated iron rule of her grandmother.

Sybil parted with her devoted friend on the plea of going back to stow away her treasure in safety, and took advantage of her liberty to turn aside to the chief silversmith's, where she expended the sum of two-and-sixpence on a superior silver thimble for Araminta, whose finger had been sorely pierced a few days previously owing to a hole in the one she was now using. With what pride and joy she walked towards home!

It was the first time in her life she had ever been able to make a present; and who deserved recognition from her so much as her dear good Minty? So absorbed and elated was she, that, meeting Tremaine as she crossed the market-place, she merely bowed and smiled, but walked on with such an evident determination not to stop that he did not attempt to speak to her.

The night of Mrs. Winter's party was fine, dry and warm. Old Dumbleton, the gardener, was Sybil's escort to the scene of the festivity. They made a detour to pick up Mr. Price's sister, a shy country girl about

Sybil's own age, who was one of the waifs patronized by Mrs. Winter, and who dared not go in by herself. The dancing had not begun when they arrived, for neither cared to make her *entrée* when the room was full.

"Hey, Miss Carew, you are in first-rate looks this evening!" said the little banker, while her companion was greeting Mrs. Winter. "Had any pleasant news?"

"Do I not always put on my best looks when I come to see you, Mr. Winter? Besides, I should be nothing without those lovely flowers Mrs. Winter sent me to brighten my black frock!"

"You are the fairest flower of them all, yourself," said Winter, who was her great admirer. "Here, Bob—Bob Playford," beckoning to a short, thin young man with lank, light hair and a despondent expression of countenance.

The young man coloured painfully and held out a large white-gloved hand.

"How d'ye do!" he said. "Hope you are quite well," and he offered his arm with a sort of shy reluctance.

He strove to converse while Sybil sipped her tea, but his thoughts evidently wandered and so did his eyes, which Sybil observed frequently turned to her young friend.

At length Mrs. Winter brought up a partner to her when Playford immediately made his way to Miss Price and they joined the quadrille.

Sybil fell to the lot of one of the "county young men," who bored her considerably. It was therefore with much joy she heard Tremaine's voice behind her

as she stood with her back to the door while the "Sides" were performing.

"I earnestly hope I am not too late to secure a few dances," he said. Sybil turned to him, smiling radiantly.

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "We have only just begun."

"The next valse then?" he exclaimed, "and as many more as you can graciously spare?"

"Very well!" she returned readily, and then her turn came. Tremaine shifted his position to one where he could watch the dance from the side opposite to Sybil.

She was perfectly aware that he watched her, and was both amused and pleased. It was quite different to dance with him from any of the few partners she had ever had before. He was so gay, so unaffected, that, though flattered by his unconcealed eagerness for her society, she was not in the slightest degree embarrassed, only heartily inclined to give him as much of it as she decently could. "I should like to tell him about that delightful editor, but I suppose I had better not; and he would laugh at children's stories and that sort of thing." Meanwhile, Tremaine was quite happy watching every movement of his latest "fancy;" she was even more graceful than he thought at first. Her gauzy black dress was adorned with a couple of deep red roses, and their dark green leaves in the point of her open bodice, and a black velvet ribbon, fastened with a brilliant paste buckle (Araminta's crown jewel) clasped her throat. Her hair was simply piled on the top of her head without ornament of any kind.

What a charming picture she made! As soon as the dance was over, Sybil retired to a sofa near the window, opening on a balcony overlooking a wide grassy space, known as "the Dean's field," at the other side of which the Cathedral stood out clear in the moonlight. Here Tremaine soon joined her.

"I have been rather miserable all this afternoon, Miss Carew," he said, leaning against the embrasure of the window.

"Have you? Why?" exclaimed Sybil sympathetically.

"Because you nearly cut me to-day—in the Market Place."

"No; indeed, indeed, I did not! I bowed; but I was in a hurry and did not want to stop, then I knew I should see and talk to you to-night."

"Ah! how admirably you teach humility."

"I do not want to teach you anything, Mr. Tremaine."

"Nevertheless, you are constantly instructing me."

"Nonsense! You know a great deal more than I do! You have been everywhere and seen everything. Oh! there is Robson, the man who plays dance music so well, I was afraid he was not coming. Miss Philips played the quadrille."

The musician, almost while she spoke, struck the first chords of a spirited waltz, and Tremaine was soon whirling his partner round the room.

"He plays very well indeed," he said, when they paused. "And though it is only a carpet dance, the floorcloth is so well stretched—or—*something*—makes it seem a capital party."

"Any sort of a dance is delightful to me," returned

Sybil frankly; "except when I have a partner who cannot keep time."

"I shall not soon forget how bewildered I felt when you told me I had improved in my dancing—that night at the Freightsborough ball." Sybil laughed low and merrily. "It was great fun; but you were a decided improvement on my *first* partner."

"I hope so! Why, by Jove; there he is!"

"Yes! He is Mrs. Winter's nephew. But Mr. Tremaine, you had *your* innings. When you threatened to come and see me, I began to grow nervous."

"*You* nervous! I cannot believe it; at all events, you turned the tables on me. You suggested a vision of romance, persecution and I know not what, that set *my* nerves quivering, I assure you."

"You don't expect me to believe—oh!" interrupting herself, "do let us dance. He may stop playing if we do not go on." They recommenced and kept up uninterruptedly till the musician struck the last notes of the "Coda."

"That was a valse, I could wish might go on for ever," said Tremaine in his partner's ear.

"It was *quite* delightful," returned Sybil, with a sincerity which somehow did not flatter him.

"There seems to be a charming view here of the Cathedral," said Tremaine, looking through the window.

"Yes, it is lovely by moonlight," replied Sybil, "ever so much better than by daylight," and she followed his lead out on the balcony. "How sweet, how peaceful;" she continued, leaning over the rail which defended it, and inhaling the delicious scents which floated upwards from the garden.

"Have you deserted the woods?" asked Tremaine, turning his back on the view, to contemplate his companion, on whom a gleam of light from the open window fell, showing the golden tinge of her hair, the graceful contour of her neck.

"Deserted the woods!" cried Sybil, opening her great grey eyes. "I never deserted them; but I have been very busy, and I have not done much walking since I saw you."

"Busy! Why what can you have to do?"

"A hundred and one things you know nothing about. Have you been exploring my favourite hunting grounds?"

"Yes; I have rambled about for three successive days, in vain."

"In vain! Did they disappoint you?"

"The woods did not disappoint me, they deserve all your praise; nevertheless, I was woefully disappointed."

"Why?" She met his eyes as she spoke and coloured.

"Because—Oh! Because I did not go merely to admire the beauties of nature—inanimate nature."

Sybil laughed good-humouredly.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "There is the music again, and I am engaged to Mr. Wyndham for the Lancers."

"Young Wyndham, of Beacham Park?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, it is his business to find you!"

"He will never think of my being out here? I had better go back."

"You are quite too painfully conscientious, Miss Carew!"

"That is my affair, Mr. Tremaine. I am going back to my seat inside."

"One moment," he exclaimed. "You will give me the next waltz?"

"Oh yes; certainly!" She turned and re-entered the room and Tremaine very reluctantly followed her.

Sybil was almost immediately pounced upon by a short, square, rubicund young squire, who blundered through the Lancers in much discomfort, and then conducted his partner back to her favourite place near the window. Sybil did not consider him worth the trouble of speaking to, and on his side he was by no means fascinated, as he remarked to a chum, "She looks like a well bred'un, but she hasn't a word to say for herself, not a syllable by Jove!"

Dance succeeded dance—Tremaine begged leave to present one or two of his brother officers, but always for square dances, dexterously reserving the waltzes for himself, and Sybil managed to secure several partners for her *protégée*, Miss Price. She was half surprised, half amused to find what an old friend Tremaine appeared to be. She felt quite confidential with him. He was so bright and self-possessed, and frankly admiring. It was her first experience of an admirer, and a very pleasant experience it was.

About twelve the pianiste was called away to have some refreshment, and Mrs. Winter came across the room to where Sybil was standing with her friend, Miss Price, Tremaine, and Bob Playford, who had danced several times with the curate's sister. "Sybil, my dear," she said, "will you be so kind as to play a waltz or a polka just to keep them going?"

"Oh, yes, with pleasure." She drew off her gloves and went to the piano. "I shall give you a treat," she said, with a little nod to Tremaine and struck the first notes of the "Tausend und eine Nacht" waltz. She played in excellent time and brought out the full tone of a first-rate piano. The inspiring strains soon set the dancers in motion. Presently she missed her fan which she had laid on the piano—half turning she saw that Tremaine was standing a little to one side, and was holding it. "You are not dancing?" she said in a tone of surprise.

Tremaine made a step nearer. "Not this waltz," he said in a low tone, "with anyone but you!"

Sybil laughed and shook her head, but did not interrupt her playing to speak.

When after some little time Mrs. Winter approached and said, "Thank you, my dear, Mr. Robson has returned; you need not go on," Sybil rose. Tremaine handed her her fan, and spoke a few words to the pianiste, who smiled, nodded, and sitting down, resumed the waltz Sybil had been playing.

"Now, Miss Carew," cried the young rifleman, "If you will be so very good—I *may* have the treat you promised!"

"I wish I knew what o'clock it is?" said Sybil, yielding to his quick movement and floating away with him.

"When we have had a couple of turns we will look at the clock," he replied.

The two turns were extended to four, when Sybil insisted on stopping.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "It is half-past twelve. I ought to have gone before."

"Why, you are not Cinderella?"

"Yes," she said with a sudden change of expression which did not escape her companion. "I am, indeed; and I must not keep poor old Dumbledon waiting."

"Does he drive your pumpkin chariot?"

"No, Mr. Tremaine; though he *is* a gardener. Nor does he bring a wheelbarrow for my accommodation, only a lantern; so I must say good night."

"A lantern! Oh! he will not mind waiting. They will make him comfortable downstairs," urged Tremaine.

"A random guess. I *must* go, though I should much rather stay. Will you be so kind as to tell Miss Price we must go? She is in the next room. Here is Mrs. Winter."

When the two girls had put on their wraps, and Dumbledon with his lantern had been summoned from the vasty but comfortable deep of Mr. Winter's kitchen, they proceeded towards the curate's home in the first instance to deposit Miss Price, and had not gone many paces when they came up with Tremaine, who was lingering near a lamp post—not that any lamp shone at the top of it. The town council of Lynchester were economical souls, and on fine moonlight nights they spared the gas.

"What! have you too left so early?" cried Sybil in some surprise.

"Yes, I have had enough dancing, and I have to be up early to-morrow. Allow me to assist old Diogenes here in conveying you safely home."

"Thank you," returned Sybil simply. "First we must take Miss Price to hers."

They walked along merrily through the moonlit streets discussing the party and the company with many a burst of youthful laughter, and many a jest at the expense of their partners.

"That poor fellow—the nephew of the house. You were rather cruel in refusing him that polka," said Tremaine.

"I do not like polkas, and he was very glad not to dance with me. I believe he is afraid of me."

"Afraid! Good heavens! Well, perhaps in his case prudence is the better part of valour."

"Perhaps. Here is Miss Price's house."

They paused before a very ancient-looking edifice of red stone in Bridge Street, near the gate.

"Have you a key, Charlotte?"

"No, nurse promised to sit up for me," and she rang gently. Soon a chain was let down, and the door cautiously opened. Good nights were exchanged, and then, to his immense satisfaction, Tremaine walked on *tête-à-tête* with his fascinating partner, for Dumbledon with his lantern dropped somewhat behind.

"We will go through the gate and up the Priory Road," said Sybil. "I do not like the crooked lanes inside the walls."

"Lead where you will," said Tremaine. "I only wish the way were longer."

Sybil made no reply. They were silent till they passed through the gate, and turning up the road to the Priory, came upon the river which flowed—a stream of rippled silver in the moonbeams—while the gorse and foliage of the opposite side showed darkly green.

"How beautiful," exclaimed Tremaine. "How

heavenly it would be to go out boating such a night as this."

Sybil was still silent. They stopped and gazed for a moment on the lovely scene.

"It will be even more charming a little higher up, when we catch sight of the bridge. Beautiful as it is, such a night is always sad and solemn to me," said Sybil. "I cannot describe the effect it has—it delights me, but—I want to say my prayers. Let us go on."

Tremaine was silent in his turn for a few moments until they reached the curve in the road, from whence the bridge was visible. After admiring the beautiful effect of light and shade and permitting Dumbledon to overtake them, Tremaine said—

"Shall you return to your woodland rambles to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow. I shall have a great deal to do to-morrow."

"What can you possibly find to do in this sleepy old place? By the way, I want something to do. I believe there is some fishing to be had on Bobingham estate."

"I believe there is. You had better ask my friend Evans, the head keeper, who has a charming cottage in these woods."

"Ah! Miss Carew, if you had any kindness or compassion, you would introduce me to him."

"I am sure I shall be very happy."

"A thousand thanks—but when? To-morrow? Will you show me the way?"

"Oh, yes, if you like; but you don't mind my saying it, you must not come to the house. Mrs. Rashleigh is rather peculiar, so——"

"Yes, yes, I quite understand. Suppose I cross the ferry at four o'clock and stroll on to the woods?"

"Yes, that will do exactly—only it must be half-past four," returned Sybil, without a shadow of hesitation. "That is, if it is fine."

"I quite understand. You are very good," returned Tremaine, wisely checking the exuberant thanks which rose to his lips, while his expressive eyes beamed with exultation.

These words brought them to a small side gate beside the stables, which admitted to the garden. Dumbledon unlocked and opened it.

"I must not go to the front, lest I disturb Mrs. Rashleigh," whispered Sybil. "Good night."

And Tremaine, bending low over the hand she gave him, murmured, "It has indeed been a good night to me."

CHAPTER VI.

AN INVITATION.

IN compassion for Miss Parry's sleep-laden eyes Sybil resisted a strong inclination to describe and enlarge upon the delights of her party, and declaring she was quite tired promised all details at breakfast next morning.

For this meal she was naturally late, and had hardly begun to tell her adventures when the impassive parlour-maid entered and said, "If you please, Miss Parry, Mrs. Rashleigh would be glad if you could go to her as soon as you have finished breakfast."

"Very well, Stone, I will come directly."

"No, Minty dear, not quite directly; she cannot be in a hurry, she had no letters to-day, and I do want to tell you a little."

"Well, just a very little."

"The house was so pretty, such quantities of flowers everywhere, and some of the dresses were very pretty too. Miss Playford, the niece who is staying there, for whom the party was given, had such a sweet frock; it was white satin with a pearl-like sheen on it, so becoming and made simply but exquisitely, only she hasn't a very good figure. I would give anything for such a frock. Charlotte Price looked very well, and danced a great deal."

"Dear Sybil, I really cannot stay; I will come back as soon as I can," and Miss Parry, hastily retreating, mounted the stairs to Mrs. Rashleigh's private sitting-room, which opened into her bedchamber. Both looked upon the city wall, which satisfied her as well as the finest view in creation.

Mrs. Rashleigh was seated on a straight high-backed chair and was very plainly clothed in a black wrapper, her white locks tucked away under a much washed muslin cap, her long capable hands busy with some plain needlework. The furniture, the parquet, and all contained in her special quarters were so shiny with constant polishing, so coldly stiff, that even on a warm May morning they struck a chill through the veins.

Mrs. Rashleigh raised her black glittering eyes, and said politely, "Good morning, Miss Parry; you are a little late, I fancy, this morning."

She never made herself unnecessarily unpleasant to her employes, until she had quite made up her mind to discard them; she was too strong to be ill-tempered, and too clear-headed not to be aware that more can be extracted in way of service by fair means than foul. On the surface she was by no means unkind to those who submitted, but her tyrant nature could be relentlessly cruel to those who dared to have a will and opinions of their own. Araminta Parry suited her exactly, and was moreover one of the cheapest articles she had ever acquired.

"Yes, Mrs. Rashleigh, I fear we overslept ourselves a little."

"An unusual occurrence with *you*, I am aware. Though I *do* breakfast alone, I know pretty well what

are the hours of my household. We have a good deal to arrange this morning. I have been looking over your month's account. There are a few items to which I wish to call your attention."

Miss Parry shivered.

"Then we must decide on the menu" (she called it *me-new*). "For the 21st I have made up the party; we shall be sixteen. I want the dinner to be a good one; let us settle that first."

She folded her work and placed it in the silk bag of an old-fashioned work table, then rising went to a large solid obstinate-looking bureau which stood at one side of the fire-place, and, unlocking it, rolled back its revolving cover.

"Pray be so kind as to bring me a chair, any one. I do not care for easy chairs."

Then she drew forth some memoranda, and after a good deal of calculation and discussion altered and corrected her notes, finally confiding them to her secretary to be copied and carried out.

In truth Mrs. Rashleigh had a strong objection to her own handwriting. It had a straggling untrained look that made it out of keeping with her pretensions and her actual position. Now Miss Parry's was clear, neat and finished; it was therefore used on all occasions, while Mrs. Rashleigh shook her head over her own failing sight.

"Ahem!" began Miss Parry's mistress, taking sundry small books and one large one from a drawer. "I observe in last month's account that the house bills have been fairly moderate, *but*"—with strong emphasis—"no saving has been effected, for the whole surplus seems

to have been expended on Miss Carew's wardrobe," and she turned a searching glance on her companion.

"I can assure you, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh, that I have been most careful (and so has Sybil) not to get an unnecessary article. But at the beginning of summer certain changes and—and renovations are necessary, therefore——" her voice died away and left her sentence unfinished.

"I see," continued Mrs. Rashleigh, reading the items without any need of glasses, "I see on the 10th of April, 'Dressmaker for Miss C., ten shillings.' Why a dressmaker? It would be more becoming, all things considered, if Miss Carew made her own dresses."

"So she generally does, Mrs. Rashleigh, but I was tempted to employ little Jane Higgins (who is really very clever), because I got the material so cheap, the day I went to Freightsborough. It was just the very thing for early summer, so I thought for the sake of expedition it would be better——"

"You bought the material at Freightsborough? Why, it was only the 3rd of April you went there," turning back the leaves. "I see no entry of that purchase."

"No, I did not enter it," said Miss Parry, blushing crimson; "I—I wished to give Sybil a little present, and it was a good opportunity, so I thought that you would not mind paying for the making."

"You are exceedingly foolish, Miss Parry, and weak, *very* weak," observed Mrs. Rashleigh in less acidulated accents. "If you imagine you can call forth gratitude from Sybil Carew you are very much mistaken."

"Believe me, Mrs. Rashleigh, *you* are mistaken," exclaimed Araminta, with almost tremulous eagerness.

Mrs. Rashleigh raised her hand deprecatingly. "I am rarely mistaken," she said; "we will not discuss the point, but I must beg you will remember that I do not like presents to be made to my granddaughter. I am willing to provide all that she *really* needs; pray remember this, Miss Parry."

Miss Parry bent her head in silence, and Mrs. Rashleigh resumed:

"Here again, on the 15th, I see 'Boots, Miss C., one pound one,' and on the 19th, 'Repair of boots, Miss C., three and ninepence.'"

She paused and leant back, the better to contemplate the culprit before her. "That seems to me an enormous sum."

"I know it does; but, believe me, it is the best economy," cried Miss Parry. "Sybil rarely has more than two pairs of boots in the year, and we *always* go to Nethersole's for them; believe me, it is *much* wiser."

"Ah! yes, according to you, and such as you, the larger the outlay the greater the economy."

"I do not think you can say that with justice," cried Miss Parry, showing spirit; "after paying up everything, I have ten shillings over from the month's allowance, and Sybil's few summer things are all provided."

"I do not deny that you are a good manager, Miss Parry, and I *prove* the confidence I have in you; but you are weak as regards Sybil Carew; you do not see the necessity of curbing her—of curbing her insolent spirit."

"Well, Mrs. Rashleigh, though you are a clever woman of the world, and I am inexperienced, espe-

cially for my years, I do *not* think you are right about Sybil——”

“Perhaps not, Miss Parry. But that is a subject I will not discuss with you or any one. I next find on the 29th of April: ‘Hosiery and haberdashery, Miss C., seventeen and nine-pence.’ I suppose you have the bills for these articles?”

“I have.” Miss Parry rummaged in a little black velvet bag and produced a small roll of bills, from which she selected two or three and laid them before her employer, who looked through them, making a few sharp queries, but finding no excuse for avowed discontent.

“The rest seems all in order,” she said thoughtfully. “Now please be so good as to copy all these items into the general book, and I shall look through the entries after. When you have finished I have one or two other matters to speak of, and to give you Dumbledon’s wages.”

“Very well, Mrs. Rashleigh.”

Miss Parry retired to a walnut-wood writing-table with twisted legs, in a distant window, and thanked heaven that her employer set forth some foreign paper and began to write with care and diligence. The anxious secretary felt greater freedom to copy, with due regard to the prescribed system and under proper heads, the record of the past month. Silence reigned in the chill apartment for nearly an hour, when Miss Parry pressed the blotting paper on the last page of the large “General Expenditure Book,” and proceeded to draw neat lines with the ruler down the centre of each page in her own day-book. When this was ac-

complished she wiped her pen and looked towards her mistress with a slightly impatient sigh. Some instinct made Mrs. Rashleigh look up at the same moment.

"You have finished?" she said. "Let me see."

Miss Parry brought her the ledger, and she looked carefully through the pages with knit brows.

"Very well," she said at length, and paused, while she put the book away in its special drawer.

"I wished to speak to you," she resumed, "because Lady Elizabeth has an idea of inviting my granddaughter to pass some days at Dene Court. Now I did not oppose that intention, but I do *not* wish Sybil to accept the invitation *if* it is sent. She is by no means a fit companion for Lady Elizabeth's gentle, refined, high-bred daughter, and moreover, she would do me no credit. So, Miss Parry, I depend on your managing that she shall refuse."

"It will not be difficult to manage, Mrs. Rashleigh. Sybil's first impulse will be to refuse; but I really do not see that she would do you any discredit. I am sure she is *most* lady-like."

"Why is she so sure to refuse Lady Elizabeth's invitation?" asked Mrs. Rashleigh, ignoring the last part of the speech.

"Oh, I cannot tell. Sybil does not care to go out much."

"Ah! her fancies are unaccountable. You must see to this, and do not let *me* be troubled about it. And, Miss Parry, I want this letter I am writing to go by the midday-post. It is for the Indian mail, for my son, Captain Rashleigh." She paused and then resumed, "From what he says I should not be surprised if he

came home before I expected—in fact, before another year.”

“I hope so,” returned Miss Parry blandly. “It will be a great pleasure to you to see him again.”

She gathered her packet of books together, and stood waiting for a distinct dismissal.

“I do not feel quite well to-day, and shall be obliged to you to send up my luncheon to me. In the afternoon I expect a visit from my Freightsborough stockbroker. I shall receive him here, and I do not think I shall want you any more.”

“Very well,” returned Miss Parry, with ill-repressed glee, and, having put the writing-materials she had used in their original order, she left the room.

Sybil was sitting at her rather crowded writing-table, pen in hand, when Miss Parry joined her, but she was gazing out of the window, with a dreamy placid expression not usual to her.

“If she only knew how Mrs. Rashleigh has been worrying about her clothes what a rage she would be in!” thought Araminta, than whom none knew better *how* angry her young favorite could be.

“Ah, Minty!” exclaimed Sybil. “What an age you have been! I seem to have waited hours.”

“Well, dear, it is the monthly day of reckoning, so you could not expect me sooner—only your grand-mamma does not always go into her accounts so early in the day.”

“Let me see. Why, Minty, you don’t look quite as much tattered and torn as usual—though you had provided so nobly for me out of the general fund.”

"Oh! I got through very well on the whole. Have you done much of your work, dear?"

"No. I have been dreaming and wasting my time. Oh, Minty, it was a delightful party last night! Mr. Tremaine was there. I danced six waltzes with him. He *is* so nice! I feel as if I had known him all my life. He came home with Charlotte Price and me. I wonder what he thought of my being allowed to walk home with poor old Dumbledon, when every one else had flys and carriages. Not that his ideas are of the slightest consequence."

"Danced six times with him!" repeated Araminta with some surprise and timid disapprobation, for her sense of propriety was of the "prunes and prism" order. "Wasn't that *rather* often, dear?"

"I don't know," returned Sybil thoughtfully (she was in a very placid mood). "It did not seem too often to me. He dances so well, and he is ever so much more agreeable than any of the others."

"Very likely," said Miss Parry, who began to feel an undefined dread of Tremaine, "but you know, Sybil, it is not well for a girl to make herself conspicuous, and this is a sadly gossiping place; it is better to be careful."

"Oh! I do not suppose any one noticed me, and I am not likely to go to another dance for a long time."

"That is true," replied Miss Parry, prudently dropping the subject. "Mrs. Rashleigh says she does not want me this afternoon, so we might have a nice long walk. Suppose we go and see poor old Mrs. Crofton? She is always so pleased when——"

"No, Minty," interrupted Sybil, "I cannot go to Oakdale to-day. I promised to meet Mr. Tremaine, and introduce him to Evans. He wants some information about fishing, so I said I would take him, and you must come too."

Miss Parry was silent for a moment. Sybil's unhesitating frankness made it difficult to find fault. There was nothing whatever to object to in two ladies taking a walk in company with a gentleman; yet, as she contemplated the startling proposition, a thick, bewildering fog of responsibility seemed to descend upon and choke her.

"Yes, dear; of course I shall go with you. But—a—where are you to meet—this Mr. Tremaine?"

"Oh! between the ferry and the woods. Why, Minty, you do not seem half pleased. It will be exceedingly pleasant to have a walk with Mr. Tremaine."

"Very likely, my dear. But—a—I am afraid your grandmamma might not approve."

"Mrs. Rashleigh! Why, you know she never cares what we do—out of her sight—so long as it is nothing she has to pay for."

"Well, my dear child, once in a way cannot do much harm."

"Harm?" cried Sybil, with some contempt and a little indignation. "Why, Minty, you are turning perfectly silly. You need not come if you do not like."

"Yes, but I *do* like. I should very much prefer to go——"

"Then we will say no more about it," returned Sybil quickly, as she dipped her pen in the ink. "Now I shall write diligently till dinner-time. Think of ten pounds, Minty, or perhaps twelve!"

"Who knows? Perhaps twenty after that," returned Araminta, rather forcing herself to enter into her young friend's humour, for a vague uneasiness was beginning to flutter her kindly heart. "When are we to see the photographs, Sybil?"

"Early next week. Mr. Tremaine says he thinks they will come out very well."

Miss Parry hesitated for a moment, watching Sybil's pen run swiftly over the page, and then went away to her household duties.

When they met again at dinner, Miss Parry held a note which she laid beside her plate until their very simple repast was over. The lady of the house lunched in her own sitting-room, as was often her choice. She treated her inmates with scant courtesy, never hesitating to show them that she preferred their room to their company.

"This is a note from Lady Elizabeth," said Araminta, as Sybil pushed back her chair. "Mrs. Rashleigh had it by the second post, and desired me to show it to you."

"To me!" cried Sybil in great astonishment. "Is the sky going to fall?" She opened the missive and read aloud—

"DEAR MRS. RASHLEIGH,

"When we spoke of the visit you have kindly promised to pay us, I omitted to mention that I should be very glad to see Miss Carew if you will bring her with you. It would, I think, do her good to be in Aline's society, and draw her out of her somewhat *farouche* silence. She need not fear any want of consideration

on the part of my dear child, who is, as you know, perfectly well bred. Pray tell your granddaughter we shall be pleased to welcome her. Looking forward to seeing you next Thursday,

“I am, dear Mrs. Rashleigh,

“Yours most sincerely,

“E. G. B. RASHLEIGH.”

“Fear!” ejaculated Sybil, when she finished reading this effusion. “It is not very likely *I* should fear poor little Aline Rashleigh. Her ladyship is very condescending,” she continued, with a scornful smile; “but she means to be kind, and did not know I should see her note.”

“Well, dear, your grandmamma says you are to do as you like about this invitation.”

“I shall certainly not go,” said Sybil resolutely. “I am sure Mrs. Rashleigh would be exceedingly vexed if I accepted it. Just think of what it would cost her to fit me out for such a visit! I have no doubt she will represent that she tried to coax me into accompanying her, and if I was disposed to go to war with her I would, but *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*. We shall be so happy together, Minty dear, when she is away.”

“But, Sybil, you do not believe that your grandmamma would tell a lie! You must admit she is very high principled.”

“Tell a lie? Oh dear, no! But I am quite sure she can speak falsely; there is a great distinction, though no real difference, between the two.”

“You are unforgiving, I fear, Sybil.”

“Perhaps I am; but am I to write a reply to this,

or send a message? I don't want to write; I shall have a lecture on caligraphy from the dear grandma if I do. Will *you* be so good as to tell her I very much prefer remaining at home. Fancy going to pay a visit with Mrs. Rashleigh for pleasure at a big country house! I really believe Lady Elizabeth means to be kind; but, dear Minty, think of how I have been brought up, or dragged up. *I* do not know the Shibboleth of the people Lady Elizabeth has about her, nor their ways. I know I am a gentlewoman, but I must be wanting in many little things. I am proud, I know, yet I also know my own deficiencies, and I will never associate with any one except on terms of perfect equality. Go, Minty; say I am much obliged to Lady Elizabeth, but I do *not* wish to visit anywhere."

"Very well, dear, but I do wish you could go," said Miss Parry mournfully.

"Well, I can't, and there is an end of it."

Miss Parry ascended to the presence chamber of their autocrat, and Sybil, having shut up her closely written sheets in a drawer, sauntered out into the grounds with a book and sat down under the shade of the beautiful ruins.

When Tremaine had got through his regimental duties that morning, he began to wish the hours would take to themselves wings to bring the moment nearer when he should meet Sybil, as she had herself so readily appointed. The young fellow was indeed hard hit. He had been greatly petted by women, and had been fond, in a light boyish way, of a good many; but in Sybil Carew he found a charm different from all those he had ever met before—a curious frankness which was all but

bold, touched with thoughtful tenderness suggestive of the sweetest possibilities. Then her keen girlish love of fun, her perfect confidence in himself, which, to do him justice, was about the strongest rampart with which she could have surrounded herself, was something so fresh and new, that from the moment he lost sight of her he longed unceasingly to meet her again. Above all, she evidently liked him—she was always ready to talk with him, dance with him, and finally meet him. Yet, somehow or other, all this was evinced with such unembarrassed candour that it did not exactly flatter him. She was barely pretty, only for her eyes, and he thought he could never tire of looking into them, and watching her changeful expression; besides, there was peculiar, careless grace in her every movement—an odd kind of assurance in no way unwomanly. No, he had never met any girl quite like Sybil Carew.

To while away the time he took refuge with MacIntyre.

“I say, MacIntyre, have you finished those photographs?”

“Yes, I have half a dozen ready; they are rather good. I intend taking them to the old lady myself. I am bidden to a feast—that is, a big dinner at the Priory, on Tuesday next.”

“The deuce you are! What a shame not to have asked me too! I say, don’t take them, like a good fellow; let me have that errand, it will be an excuse for a visit.”

“Well, my laddie, I suspect you are a ‘gone coon.’”

“I do not deny it. One must have some excitement.”

"I dare say the old lady will cut up comfortably if you have any serious intentions," said MacIntyre yawning—he had been dozing over a dry book on military tactics when Tremaine came in.

"Intentions!" cried Tremaine, "what's the good of my having intentions? I never had much money, and I have spent the little I had."

"Then you take care, that's all!"

"Now don't you give me any advice until I ask it, MacIntyre."

"Very well. It all comes to the same. You'll not take it any way."

"Don't you fish?" exclaimed Tremaine, after a short pause.

"No," returned the other; "never could see the fun of it."

"Well, I am going to try my hand at fly-fishing. I believe there's some to be had near this."

"You! Why you are not the sort of meditative chap that could get on with a rod and line."

"Oh! I can tell you I was a dab at it when I was a boy. I've never had much chance since, and there is nothing else to be done till August."

"There are the charms of social intercourse," said MacIntyre drily. "A tennis party at Dene Court on Monday, a picnic to Rowton Castle on Wednesday, a dinner at the Bishop's on——"

"Why, MacIntyre! You don't suppose that I am going to bore myself at these sorts of mediæval entertainments!"

"Oh, I don't know; if you choose to leave Brooke to

make all the running with the present first favourite, why——”

“Brooke? Why, Brooke doesn’t know her—I mean——”

“Oh, yes, he does, and admires her to no end. He met her—where was it?—in the Market Place, when she would hardly see or speak to him—and at Mrs. Winter’s dance. He says there’s something wonderfully taking about her.”

Tremaine did not answer. He fancied somehow or other Miss Carew was not likely to be at these parties, but he would not commit himself to any reply. Suddenly he exclaimed, “Is your clock right, MacIntyre?”

“A minute or two slow.”

“Ha, quarter to four! I must be off; and look here, you’ll leave those photographs to me?”

“Eh! I’m not so sure. I’ll tell you to-morrow.”

“Oh, yes, you will; good-bye, till this evening,” and Tremaine vanished.

“Ah! he’s worse than I have known him for a long time,” thought MacIntyre, putting a mark in his book before preparing for his afternoon ride.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE WOODS.

It was a pleasant softly grey afternoon with a few threatening clouds to dim the sunlight. "I hope to heaven it won't rain," thought the young rifleman as he walked at a rapid pace, unnecessarily rapid, towards the ferry. "Of course that would put an end to our ramble. I must reconnoitre the ground. I fancy there are some yards of the path between the ferry and the woods open to the enemy's fire, that is the Priory drawing-room windows, and if I should occasionally indulge my taste for sylvan scenery about the same time of day as Miss Carew, why, I would rather not be espied making my way across. There must be some short cut higher up the common from the Freightsborough road. I will explore the country."

Having landed at the other side, Tremaine walked straight on till he found himself under the shelter of the outlying trees before described, where he halted, and resting his back against a wide-spreading beech he lit a cigar and prepared to wait with patience. From his position he could get a peep of the Priory grounds and a short space of the steep path leading to the river gate. This he watched steadily and was presently rewarded by seeing a slight figure wearing a large hat descend it quickly. "She is coming!" he said, half

aloud. "In ten minutes she will be here, if old Charon is at the other side when she gets to the ferry. How sweet of her to come! I suspect she has a hard time of it with the handsome old ogress, her grandmother. I don't know how it is, but I do not fancy that ancient dame, especially as she did not ask me to dinner." He started forward as if to meet Sybil, and then stopped. "I had better stay where I am," was his wiser second thought, as he threw away his half-consumed cigar. A few minutes more, and *two* ladies came round a bend in the path. "By George!" said Tremaine, with indignant disappointment, "she has brought the *gouvernante*," but he went forward to meet them with a joyous air.

"I was afraid you had not come," said Sybil, as soon as they had exchanged greetings, "not seeing you at the ferry."

"Not come!" echoed Tremaine, a look of astonishment coming into his eyes at the words. "You don't suppose I should have lost such a chance?"

"You might have been busy."

"Oh! we generally get over our work in the morning. What a charming day for a walk!"

"The woods would be the better of the sunshine," said Miss Parry, who felt positively nervous at the idea of going out deliberately with Sybil to meet a young man, nay worse, a young officer—for Araminta had the upper *bourgeois* dread of soldiers as doubtful and dangerous people.

"I dare say you are right," returned Tremaine, who felt it was important to make friends with Sybil's companion. "The effect of the golden light filtering through

green leaves is exquisite. You are probably an artist, Miss Parry?"

"Indeed, I cannot claim the title," with a slight blush and deprecating smile. "I learned at school, of course, but since I left I have had no chance of practice or instruction."

"I have always longed to draw and paint," put in Sybil, "but I haven't the smallest ability in that line. I often try to write about scenery and trees and things, but the result is woefully disappointing."

"You ought to learn photography, Miss Carew; it is not a bad substitute for art."

"Oh no! there is an indescribable lifelessness about photography; it does very well for buildings, but for trees, and such dear living things, no!" Here Oscar, who had taken an excursion on his own account, rejoined them and thrust himself between Sybil and Tremaine, permitting in a friendly way the latter to stroke him.

"Oscar is quite condescending to you, Mr. Tremaine," said Sybil. "In general he is excessively exclusive. He treats Mr. Playford with silent contempt. Mr. Playford was most amiably attentive, but Oscar would not take the slightest notice of him."

"That's the little fellow you said was afraid of you! Pray, why is he afraid of Miss Carew?" addressing Araminta.

"Afraid! Oh no! He can't be afraid of a young lady!"

"I should think he would though. Why, young ladies are most terrific, Miss Parry. I am only getting

accustomed to the terrors of their presence. Miss Carew is one of the most awful I have ever encountered."

Sybil laughed, "I am glad to hear it. I shall think more of myself in future. Are you in a hurry to reach the keeper's cottage, Mr. Tremaine?"

"No, by no means! I am ready to wander about these woods till midnight if you like."

"That would be rather long. I only want to show you a favourite resting-place of mine, and such a pretty peep of the river. See, Oscar knows the turn," as that animal suddenly quickened his pace and took a narrow path to the left.

"I am very thankful for your guidance. No one seems to know these woods but you."

"They are very little frequented except on Sundays, when the townspeople ramble about here. In the week I rarely meet a creature."

"Is it safe for you to come here quite alone?" asked Tremaine.

"I seldom or never do! I always have Oscar, and I coax Miss Parry to come as often as I can; sometimes when I have a book, or sit dreaming, Oscar will lie beside me for hours." A few minutes more brought them to Sybil's favourite spot by the pebbly margin of the river.

"It is indeed the fitting haunt for a wood nymph—as I thought you must be that evening at Freightsborough, with the oak-leaves in your hair," said Tremaine, smiling.

"It is a delightful place to read in, the soft rush of the water is so soothing, it floats one's imagination

away into the most distant lovely impossible happy-lands."

"Why, Miss Carew, I feel quite sure you are a poetess."

"Indeed," said Araminta, who never could refrain from boasting her adored Sybil's many talents, "Miss Carew has written a whole book full of beautiful verses."

"Minty!" cried Sybil, colouring to her eyes, "If I thought you would have been such a traitor, I should not have brought you with me! It is unpardonable to tell tales out of school."

"I knew you were poetical," exclaimed Tremaine, partly to tease her. "Your eyes, your expression, the very turn of your head betray you!"

"I shall never forgive you, Minty," said Sybil.

"Perhaps," continued Tremaine demurely, "when (if I am so fortunate) I am better known to you, I may be honoured by a sight of these compositions. They are, I am sure, graceful and original?"

"I shall put them in the fire this evening," said Sybil, in a low voice.

"Miss Parry, can you not avert such a catastrophe!" exclaimed Tremaine, in a tone of entreaty.

"Hush," whispered Sybil, lifting her hand. "Listen!" The low loving "coo" of the wood-pigeon came softly from the recesses of the wood. "There is poetry and song in one," she added. "Now, as you are not sufficiently impressed with the charm of the wood nymph's haunt, we will go on." They retraced their steps to the broader footway.

"Is it much further on to the trout stream I have heard of?" asked Tremaine.

"A couple of miles I think," returned Sybil. "It is above the meeting of the waters—where two streams join this river—they are all small, but union makes size as well as strength."

"If you want to go to the trout streams," said Miss Parry, "you would not come by this way—it is a great round; you must go by the Freightsborough Road till you come to the 'Coach and Horses' inn, and then take the Acol Bridge Road, which crosses the upper part of these woods."

"Oh! Evans will tell you all about that," added Sybil.

Talking easily on many topics, the way to the keeper's lodge did not seem long, but arrived there, no keeper was to be found. He had not yet come in to his tea, nor did Mrs. Evans expect him yet awhile. "But as to the fishing, sir," she said, when Sybil explained the object of their visit, "though my husband would be pleased to assist you in any way, the place to get leave to fish is at the agent's, in the town. It's a big house with a green door at the corner of Westgate Street and the Market Place." Tremaine thanked her courteously, and Sybil turned to speak to the pale delicate-looking child, Ju, who was sitting in a low chair dressing a doll.

"I am sure, miss," said the mother to Sybil, "that beautiful doll you brought her has done her more good than all the doctor's stuff; she takes it to bed with her and doesn't dream half so bad as she used."

"What ails the little one?" asked Tremaine kindly. Miss Parry explained that, crossing a field on her way home from school, she had been chased by a bull and

would probably have been killed had not a man who was at work near by come to her rescue. Sybil happened to meet him as he was carrying the poor little half-insensible creature to her home and accompanied them, hoping to be of use. The child had been in a deplorably weak state ever since and Sybil was a frequent visitor to the little invalid.

"Perhaps, ma'am," said the mother to Miss Parry, "you wouldn't mind stepping into my room, to look at a piece I cut out of the paper last week. It is an account of a new cure as might be good for my little Ju; also there's the last bottle of sleeping medicine, it has a curious smell, and you know so much you might be able to tell me what it is." Miss Parry assented and followed Mrs. Evans into the adjoining chamber.

"Do come and look at the charming glade which opens on the left here," said Tremaine, who was standing at the open door. "The sun has struggled out and the effect is beautiful."

Sybil joined him. "Yes," she said, "it is beautiful! There is a path through it, which takes you to the bridge. Miss Parry and I often walk there."

"And here is a rustic seat from which you can look straight down into the leafy depths," said Tremaine. "It is so much better out of doors."

Sybil took her place upon it silently and Tremaine sat down beside her. Oscar joined them, taking his place at his young mistress's feet. Silence reigned for a few minutes, Sybil looking away down the picturesque opening which widened in the distance, where a gleam of evening sunlight fell across it, and Tremaine stealing glances at the face partly turned from him.

"It was very unkind of you," he said at last, "not to make Mrs. Rashleigh ask me to her dinner on Tuesday. MacIntyre is going, and I believe Brooke. Why am I left out?"

Sybil's thoughtful expression vanished. "I don't think my advocacy would do you much good," she said, turning to him with an amused smile. "Besides I don't fancy my grandmother's dinners are feasts of reason; they are, I believe, stiff and dull."

"But don't you know?" in a slightly curious tone.

Sybil shook her head. "I never am present at a dinner party."

"Ah! I understand; you are not 'out,' you have not been presented."

"Why, Mr. Tremaine," a little indignantly, "I am nineteen. As to being presented, you might as well talk of the Queen being presented to me!"

"Then why——"

"Oh! I cannot tell," she interrupted. "Perhaps Mrs. Rashleigh does not think me deserving of such an honour as to sit at table with the bishop, or even with the dean. But I am not inconsolable. In winter I sit in our (Miss Parry's and my) special room, and read. In summer I often take my book to my own haunt by the river. You will grant I am in better company?"

"Well, I neither know the Lynchester people nor the books you read, but I am sure the dinner would be the brighter for your presence."

"Not if I bestowed the presence against my will," said Sybil, shaking her head. "I am afraid I am not what is called amiable."

"Ah! perhaps not," returned Tremaine, with a

laughing glance, "and there is something else akin to amiability which you could never be—insipid."

"Thank you! that is nicely said." There was a pause during which Tremaine reflected: "Either my *rara avis* has the deuce's own temper, or the grandmother is a tyrannical old devil. Well, I'll believe in the granddaughter; no cross-grained woman ever had so sweet a mouth." Then he asked aloud, "Used your uncle to fish when he was at home?"

"My uncle?" repeated Sybil, turning a pair of very much surprised eyes full on him. "I have no uncle. Whoever do you mean?"

"Why, Rashleigh! Captain Rashleigh, the gunner, your grandmother's son."

"There is not a drop of Rashleigh blood in my veins," said Sybil, very quietly and deliberately, yet conveying the idea of utterly abjuring the family, root and branch. "Brian Rashleigh is my grandmother's stepson, and her favourite, because, I suppose, it is a case of like to like."

"Ah! now I understand; it was rather a puzzle. I fancied, as most people do, he was her son by her first marriage."

Sybil shook her head. "He is the son of her second husband."

"He is rather a fine fellow," said Tremaine. "A good officer, and one of the keenest sportsmen in the service."

"Very likely. I do not suppose he would mind torturing the poor wild animals."

"Come, Miss Carew, a true sportsman is never cruel,

and surely an Irishwoman ought to sympathize with a lover of sport?"

"Perhaps so. I remember my poor dear father loved shooting and fishing—oh! long ago, when I was quite a little girl—and he was kind and gentle and sweet; very different from Captain Rashleigh."

"Then he is not a favourite of yours?"

"I dislike him extremely," returned Sybil, in a gentle, deliberate tone, which was nevertheless exceedingly expressive of a very settled condition of mind.

"I must not be so indiscreet as to ask why?" insinuated Tremaine.

"No, you had better not. *I* have been indiscreet in speaking of him as I did, to a stranger, for you *are* a stranger, though somehow you do not seem like one."

"Don't you think you can trust me?" he asked.

Sybil turned and looked steadily into his eyes. "Yes!" she said, "if I did not feel I could, why should I forget you are a new acquaintance?"

"A new acquaintance," cried Tremaine. "What a fearfully formal phrase. Believe me I shall keep your unfavourable opinion of Rashleigh locked within my own breast or heart, whichever is most suited to a padlock."

"Never mind heart or breast, place it on your *lips*."

"And," resumed Tremaine, "if in time you consider me worthy of knowing the cause, the head and front of Rashleigh's offending——" He paused.

"If you stay long enough, I shall probably tell you—that is, if you still care to know; but I fancy that even now you think it is merely some childish whim. I rather think men and women estimate things very differently."

Here Miss Parry joined them and suggested it was high time to go homewards.

On their way back Tremaine and Miss Parry did most of the talking, Sybil appearing occupied with her own thoughts, occasionally dropping her hand to touch Oscar's head caressingly.

"Shall I have the pleasure of meeting you at the Dene Court tennis gathering next week?" he asked at length, for he began to miss her voice.

"No! I never go to Dene Court. Mrs. Rashleigh is going to stay there, so Miss Parry and I will keep house together for a whole week."

"Ah! Indeed! When does Mrs. Rashleigh go?"

"On Wednesday or Thursday," returned Miss Parry, "and I must say Lady Elizabeth invited Miss Carew very pressingly to be of the party."

"What a determined recluse you must be! Do you object to tennis on principle?"

"I am afraid I have not much principle; at all events, I prefer staying at home with Minty—I mean Miss Parry," and she looked kindly into her friend's simple face.

"Is Major MacIntyre going?" was Sybil's next question.

"Yes; I rather fancy so."

"I like Major MacIntyre," said Sybil, meditatively. "He amuses me. He is not like any one I ever met before; then I have not seen many people—at least, since I was in France, and that is a long time ago."

"Did you make a long stay there?" asked Tremaine.

"We were three years in Tours and two in Paris."

"I suppose you were rather too young to appreciate the delights of Paris."

"I don't know. At all events, I look back to it now as a heavenly place," returned Sybil, with a sigh.

Those words brought them to the ferry. Oscar inspected their embarkation with ears anxiously cocked, and then jumped in himself.

At the opposite side Tremaine made his adieux.

Miss Parry and Sybil walked home rather silently, exchanging a word now and again respecting Little Ju, the new cure and the prospect of an additional piece of potato ground, which the under-agent had promised Evans.

Tea was half over, when Sybil suddenly asked: "Well, Minty, how do you like Mr. Tremaine?"

"He is a very nice gentlemanlike young man, Sybil, very——" She stopped short, evidently suppressing the final portion of her sentence.

"Now, Minty! what Jesuitical reservation are you making?"

"Me, Sybil? Nothing at all dear. Mr. Tremaine seems a very bright, well-behaved young man—nothing scoffing or—or impudent about him. Indeed he has a great look of my dear brother John's eldest boy."

"Then your eldest nephew must be a very good-looking boy," returned Sybil emphatically and unblushingly. "But I am quite sure you have some undefined objection to Mr. Tremaine. Never mind, I shall find out all you think later on, you profound Minty."

"Well, Sybil dear, I don't pretend to know much of the world, but fascinating young men are not always to be trusted. In a week or two he may be ordered

elsewhere, and you may never see him again. I want you to remember *that*, dear."

"Yes, I suppose he may, Minty," returned Sybil gravely. "I am quite aware of that, but," a bright smile sparkling in her eyes and on her lips, "is that any reason why I should not enjoy a little talk with him now and then? Do you think I am a sort of girl to trouble myself about a casual acquaintance?"

"I am sure I do not know, Sybil. Inexperienced girls are—are apt to take foolish fancies, but you are rather different from the generality, and——"

The sound of the door bell interrupted their conversation.

"That's Mrs. Rashleigh's ring, isn't it?" exclaimed Sybil. "I did not know she was out."

"There was a drawing-room Zenana meeting at the Deanery this afternoon, and I suppose your grand-mamma stayed to tea. She is a great favourite with the Dean and Mrs. Courteney. I had better go and see if she wants anything," and Miss Parry rose quickly to wait on her rather exacting mistress.

"I wish Minty would not worry about nonsense," mused Sybil, slowly stirring her last cup of tea. "Why should I shut my eyes to the tiny bit of blue in my cloudy sky? No; if there is a pleasant moment to be had, I will seize it and leave the result to Providence."

As she arrived at this wise conclusion, Mrs. Rashleigh walked into the dining-room, an unusual proceeding on her part, it being her habit to go upstairs to her own sitting-room. In addition to the iron hardness of her "stay at home" expression, there was a frown on her brow and a look of displeasure in her eyes. Miss

Parry followed, asking in dulcet tones, "Shall I have fresh tea made, Mrs. Rashleigh?"

"No, I thank you; I have had all I want. Bring me a chair." Her glance directed this command to Sybil, whose name she rarely uttered. "I think it is by no means polite or well-bred of you," she continued, still addressing her granddaughter, "not to reply to Lady Elizabeth Rashleigh's kind invitation yourself. I must say I hesitated to advise your sending a note of excuse because of your curious and objectionable handwriting. It is very different from what she is accustomed to."

"I am very sorry my writing seems so bad to you," returned Sybil, with cold but respectful composure, "for I fear it is too late to change it; nor do I think Lady Elizabeth would be so shocked by it as you imagine. Most girls write the same kind of hand now, and at least it is legible."

Mrs. Rashleigh's stern black eyes gazed fixedly at the speaker as if she wanted to intimidate a lunatic, but Sybil's met them unflinchingly. When the two did speak together this kind of silent duel generally went on, the soft grey eyes always proving equal to the encounter.

"Very well; write this evening and let me see if you express yourself properly before you post your note."

"What shall I say?" asked Sybil demurely. "If *you* wish me to go, of course I shall accept."

Mrs. Rashleigh's face changed and assumed a more guarded expression. "You are very obliging," she said, "but considering I have, at your wish, already refused

for you, it is impossible to take so great a liberty as to say you have changed your mind. Make what excuse you like—if you have any.”

“As you have already refused for me, I have only to thank Lady Elizabeth for her kind thought, and it was *very* kind of her,” she added in a frank natural tone.

“It was indeed,” returned Mrs. Rashleigh emphatically. There was a pause; while poor Araminta, who was in a condition of tremulous nervousness, such as generally afflicted her when grandmother and granddaughter spoke face to face in her presence, put the tea things together on a tray softly.

“I heard a good deal of your friend, Mr. Price,” resumed Mrs. Rashleigh. “It seems he is not only almost a dissenter, but altogether a Radical. He has been working and canvassing for Doctor Evans, in opposition to that nice gentlemanlike Doctor Rogers, in the coming election for a new head physician at the Infirmary. I beg, Sybil, you will never bring Mr. Price, or any of his family, inside my doors.”

“Of course I would not bring any of the Prices—or anyone else—into your house,” returned Sybil quickly.

“I must say it is anything but good taste on your part,” continued Mrs. Rashleigh, “to cultivate a set of people I disapprove of, whose principles are unsound, and who back up a democratic pretender, quite unsuited to the office he seeks to fill.”

“But,” urged Sybil, “Mr. and Mrs. Price are *high* principled people. See how they struggle to present a respectable appearance. They never tell lies—they

pay their debts; and, after all, people must differ in opinion sometimes. It would never do to have all the world Conservative. If Mr. or Mrs. Price said anything against *you*, or were rude to *you*, then of course I should not go near them. As to Dr. Evans, I believe——”

“Enough!” interrupted Mrs. Rashleigh, who had resumed her usual tone of cold contempt. “I do not care to listen to your crude audacity. If you have not sufficient sense of propriety to relinquish objectionable acquaintances voluntarily, I will not interfere with you.” She rose as she spoke.

“Thank you,” said Sybil with much politeness, and she went to hold the door open for her grandmother, closing it gently a minute after she had passed through.

“That was rather a satisfactory passage of arms,” remarked Sybil, throwing herself into a large leathern easy chair. “And you, poor dear Minty, you were in an agony all the time; I know you were!”

“Indeed, Sybil, I did feel miserable. It is very, *very* unwise to contradict and irritate your grandmother in that way. Conciliation is not only your duty, but your best policy. Mrs. Rashleigh is the strongest; gentleness and patience might win her heart.”

“Nonsense, Minty. How could I win what does not exist! If she leaves me alone I will be polite and attentive. She always begins. Something has vexed her out of doors to-day; so she attacked my handwriting. Then the temptation of offering to go to Dene Court was too much; that finished it. I understand her perfectly. She took care not to forbid my intercourse with the poor dear Prices. She first gave me

sufficient warning to entitle her to assert that I persisted in keeping up with them in spite of her remonstrances."

"Sybil, my love, you are too severe in your strictures on one so much your senior as Mrs. Rashleigh, and besides, you really owe everything to her, you must not forget that."

"Minty! you know I remember it only too bitterly. I have more than once—nay, four or five times—entreated her to let me try to earn my own bread (I could, Minty, in a school), and she would not hear of it. Now, there is nothing for it but to wait patiently till I am my own mistress. In less than two years I shall be twenty-one, and a day longer I will not stay here. Perhaps—oh! perhaps, Minty, I may have work enough then to live by my pen. Perhaps we might live together. Would it not be delightful!" and she threw her arms round Minty's neck. "If it is true that 'from small beginnings noble structures rise,' *this* would be a splendid superstructure to raise on three pounds ten shillings."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STATE DINNER.

A STATE dinner at the Priory was not exactly a festival to Miss Parry. To her lot fell all the work and none of the play—if the stately guests could be supposed to play.

She inspected the final polishing of the plate, the setting up of the many wax candles, the uncovering, almost at the last moment, of the drawing-room furniture, the selection of the wine, according to a list furnished by Mrs. Rashleigh, while it was her painful duty to mount guard in the morning-room over the extra bottles, in order to deliver them on demand to the highly respectable temporary butler, who described his dual occupations epigrammatically to an inquiring stranger: "Well, mum, I waits on week days and verges on Sundays."

Then the decoration of the table was also included in Miss Parry's multifarious duties, but of this Sybil relieved her, besides assisting in all the rest. This of her own free will, for one of Mrs. Rashleigh's modes of expressing indifference towards her granddaughter was that she never asked her to do the smallest service in the house. Having, however, done her best to lighten her dear "Minty's" task, made the table beautiful with blooms and greenery, and "printed" the guest's names

on cards to mark their places, to avoid the offence of her bold straight caligraphy, she felt the evening was her own; so, shortly before the guests began to arrive, she took a pet volume, called Oscar, and betook herself to the ferry and the woods.

Miss Parry looked after her wistfully as she vanished down the slope to the river. Her somewhat wilful young friend was very dear to her. Sybil had brought more of sunshine and colour into her monotonous life than it had ever known; moreover, she felt she was of real use and importance to the lonely orphan. This raised Araminta in her own estimation, as her natural humility disposed her to a depressing sense of her insignificance. To walk with her, talk with her, listen to her castle-building, or to wonder at the genius displayed in her children's stories, was pure joy, and, though tenaciously loyal to her employer, she was almost roused to indignation against Mrs. Rashleigh for not dressing Sybil more liberally, and for not being proud to acknowledge her as a grandchild.

Araminta Parry was indeed among the lowliest of that unpretending class, the penniless old maids, for whom the world has few rewards and no prizes; and yet to their lot falls much of the burden and heat of the day. That some of them are slightly soured in temper and warped in judgment may well be pardoned; but what help and healing others bestow upon their troubled fellows! What a boon is the maiden aunt to many an overtaxed mother or widowed father! Well, their "coming by and by" will be all the brighter and better for the modern ideas which promise independence and the chance of self-support to "single women."

With a slight sigh Miss Parry settled herself with a piece of needlework in her hand and a row of bottles beside her, and listened for the sound of arriving guests.

Mrs. Rashleigh, in a most carefully arranged toilette, awaited them in the drawing-room.

Mr. Rashleigh and Lady Elizabeth were the first to arrive, and were greeted with stiff cordiality—the former was quite an old man, having married late in life. That Aline, their much cherished daughter, had not been a son, was a cruel disappointment, but the fast rolling years had accustomed him to the idea of his nephew's succession to the family estates, and the will of his rather imperious wife had constrained him to co-operate with her in the system of strict economy, not to say cheeseparing, by which she hoped to accumulate a fortune for their daughter, in case their favourite scheme of marrying her to Brian Rashleigh fell through. She had been presented, and had gone through the ordeal of three seasons without any better result than the offer of marriage from two impecunious younger sons. They had therefore decided to spend the sweet springtime in the country this year.

“So glad, dear Mrs. Rashleigh, to have a word with you before any one else comes,” said Lady Elizabeth, who was very magnificent in black and gold brocade, with an old-fashioned necklace of huge amethysts. “I wanted to tell you that my brother Stanmore is going to Norway and I don't know where, in his yacht, so he has offered us his pretty villa, on the Devonshire coast, for June and July. It will be a pleasant change, and we all hope you will come with us, at least for a

month. It will do you all the good in the world, and Aline will be so pleased."

"You are very good, Lady Elizabeth. I am sure it is a most tempting invitation. You must allow me to consider if I can avail myself of it," returned the hostess well pleased. "I had a letter and small parcel from Brian this morning, about which——"

"The dean, Mrs. and Miss Courteney," announced the verger-butler, and the sentence remained unspoken. The company now arrived in quick succession. Mr. and Mrs. Crosby, the hereditary lawyer and agent of Lynchester, who knew the secrets of all the great families on this side of the county, and his pretty wife, Canon Brereton and Miss Brereton (an elderly young lady), Major MacIntyre, Colonel Blackett, the Bishop and Mrs. Dobbs, Mr. and Lady Mary Wyndham. In truth, a goodly company. Mrs. Rashleigh's heart swelled with exultation as she compared the present and the past, mentally summing up the distinctions of her dinner-party. Two ladyships, one her own sister-in-law, a bishop, a canon and a colonel—while even the rank and file were unmistakably of the upper ten. "Very sorry, my dear young lady, not to have my niece to keep you company," she said, with her most benevolent smile. "Youth needs youth, but unfortunately for *me* she has gone to spend a few days in town with her cousin, the Duchess of Chiselhurst."

Dinner was now announced, and the guests having been duly marshalled, like reapers descended to the harvest of good things awaiting them. Mr. Rashleigh led the way with Lady Mary Wyndham; Mrs. Rashleigh brought up the rear with the bishop.

Soup, fish, *entrées* and sherry having warmed the "convives" into temporary oblivion of the caution and distrust of their neighbours with which almost all well brought up orthodox persons begin dinner, conversation began to flow with more fluency. Lady Elizabeth discussed with the bishop the shameful and unprincipled resistance to the tithe by the small farmers of a neighbouring shire, or rather Lady Elizabeth held forth, and the bishop, a most scholarly, but reserved personage, who, like the late Von Moltke, was silent in various languages, ancient and modern, listened, and occasionally nodded. Mrs. Rashleigh listened to some curious anecdotes and morsels of intricate county family history, from Colonel Blackett on her left. The dean, an enthusiastic musical amateur, talked of the possibilities of a musical festival in the autumn with Lady Mary Wyndham. Mrs. "Dean" and Mrs. Dobbs exchanged their views respecting the newly married wife of a converted Jew missionary, who had been preaching in the town, where he had made a halt on his way to Freightsborough. Mrs. Crosby talked politics amicably to the canon, being both Conservatives of the deepest dye. Mr. Rashleigh, being slightly deaf, gave himself unreservedly to his dinner, and reaped the reward of single-mindedness.

MacIntyre, who had glanced round the table with an inquiring look, addressed the canon's sister, whom he had taken in to dinner. "Table looks uncommonly well; something quaint in the arrangement of the flowers."

"Yes! it is very charming; but dear Mrs. Rashleigh has such exquisite taste!" returned Miss Brereton.

"Do you think Mrs. Rashleigh arranged them? I don't think, somehow, she did! She doesn't look like it! More probably it was Miss Carew. By the way, I suppose she is too 'grown up' to come in to dessert, eh? Is she away, that we haven't the pleasure of seeing her?"

"No, I believe she is at home, but she rarely appears at her grandmamma's parties. I fear she is a little peculiar, and quite obstinately averse to society; indeed I have been told she is a great trial to poor Mrs. Rashleigh. Her father, I believe, was very eccentric, and, altogether, she is not quite like other girls."

"Ha! hum! that is possible! Perhaps she will join us in the drawing-room."

Miss Brereton shook her head ominously.

"I can't understand a girl like Miss Carew shutting herself up; she seems to me full of life."

"Sometimes!" returned Miss Brereton, with emphasis. "But it is hard to make friends with her; she does not seem to care for church work, nor charitable schemes, nor any of the occupations in which all the rest of us girls are interested."

"Oh, indeed! Well, there is no accounting for taste."

"Hock or champagne?" whispered the verger-waiter in confidential tones, which implied that the strictest secrecy would be observed.

"Hock," replied MacIntyre. "So Miss Carew is of the stay-at-home order? Doesn't she play tennis?"

"I do not know; I have never seen her at any tennis party. Oh! Major MacIntyre, is that Mr. Tremaine a very intimate friend of Captain Rashleigh! Mrs. Courteney was saying so the other day."

"No, not particularly intimate. We all knew Rashleigh—we were in the same station in India."

"Well, Mrs. Courteney said he was, and that is why Mrs. Rashleigh invited Mr. Tremaine here, for you never see a young man in her house."

"Thank you," said MacIntyre, drily. "May I ask what is the limit of age?"

"Oh, Major MacIntyre! I seem to have made a very rude speech! But I mean *young* in the sense of boyish!"

"Oh, ah! I understand. I rather think Tremaine has cut his wisdom teeth, but he will be a boy to the end of the chapter."

"Is it true he is going to ride in the gentlemen's steeplechase at Freightsborough next month?"

"Yes. He is the best horseman in the regiment."

"It will be a most interesting race?"

"Yes, especially to those who have put their money on it."

"Ah, it is a deplorable thing, betting on horses."

"Why on horses especially? Why not——"

Here a signal passed between Mrs. Rashleigh and Mrs. "Bishop," whereupon the ladies rose and departed.

"Tell me, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh," said Lady Elizabeth, when the hostess came to her after exchanging civil sentences with the rest of her guests, "what were you going to say about Brian when the people began to arrive?" And she made room on the sofa where she was sitting.

"I had a letter and a parcel through his agent from him this morning," said Mrs. Rashleigh, taking

the vacant place. "The parcel contained a very handsome gold bangle for your dear girl, which I am to give her with her cousin's love, on her birthday. I must say I was greatly pleased at such unusual thoughtfulness on Brian's part; you know how undemonstrative he is. This shows that he is alive to Aline's merits and charm. I do not pretend to disguise my wish that my dear son (for indeed he is a son to me) should secure his own happiness by winning your sweet child, especially as you are not averse to such a union. Then I might retire to some humble home within reach of my dear ones, and restore this dear old house to its rightful owner, for——"

"By no means, my dear Mrs. Rashleigh," interrupted Lady Elizabeth, eagerly. "Should such a marriage occur, respecting which I will not commit myself, none of us would wish to disturb you. Brian is too fond of his profession to settle anywhere for a considerable time, and in the course of nature my dear husband cannot long keep the heir from his inheritance. The hope of seeing my beloved child mistress of her early home, the home of her forefathers, is, I confess, tempting; but—the future is in wiser and more powerful hands than ours," concluded Lady Elizabeth piously, and then glided into a discussion of their summer plans.

"It is rather unfortunate that Mrs. Rashleigh has no piano," said the musical dean to Mrs. Crosby; "it is unusual to see a house like this without one."

"And a sign that there is no daughter in it," returned that lady. "I suppose Miss Carew does not play?—indeed," lowering her voice, "I believe her educa-

tion has been sadly neglected, though, I must say, she has very good manners when you *do* meet her."

"Then Mrs. Rashleigh is so fond of cards, she really does not care for music."

"A good game of whist is not to be despised," said Mr. Wyndham, who stood near, coffee cup in hand, for coffee was served in the old-fashioned style in the drawing-room, "and Mrs. Rashleigh's play is exceptionally good."

Here the hostess sailed up, a pack of cards in her hand, from which both the dean and Mr. Wyndham took one. The bishop, who never touched cards himself, though not forbidding them to others, and his wife, now took their leave. He was somewhat ascetic in his habits, and kept early hours. Then the rest of the party settled down to whist, the two young ladies and Mr. Rashleigh excepted, while MacIntyre waited his chance to cut in—and time went swiftly till the Dene Court equipage was announced.

But time did not go swiftly to poor Miss Parry, sitting alone in the quiet morning-room, not having yet been relieved from guard. The spare bottles had been restored to the cellar, the half or three-quarter empty decanters safely locked up in the cellarette, while the cognac and whisky with the accompanying seltzer water had been duly set forth on a side table in the hall. Araminta therefore still kept watch. It had been an uneasy time to her, for Sybil had been unusually late in returning. It was nearly nine when she came in. She looked well and bright, and bestowed a kiss on Araminta before she took off her hat.

"Well, Minty; how are you getting on? Is the

festivity nearly over? I do not know what o'clock it is."

"It is a good deal too late for you to be out alone, Sybil," returned Araminta severely—for her.

"But I was *not* alone, dear. Mr. Tremaine escorted me to the ferry, and——"

"Mr. Tremaine! How was that? Surely he ought to have been at dinner himself?"

"Ah, that is his affair! Oh, Minty, you have some supper for me! What a dear kind thing you are."

"I *did* ask cook to remember you, Sybil. She has just sent Mary up with a bit of sweetbread and some cream."

"That is delightful! I am quite hungry! Have you had supper yourself, Minty? No, I see you haven't, and you look quite fagged. Now you must have some of mine, there is much more than I could eat." A little amicable altercation ensued, then they shared the good things "cook" had provided—not very equally, for Miss Parry did not seem to have much appetite.

"Tell me," she asked, when the friendly housemaid had carried off the tray, "when did you meet that Mr. Tremaine?" The tone of her voice struck Sybil as unfriendly.

"Well," she began, curling herself up in a large old arm-chair, minus a castor, "I went straight to my own resting-place (it is so nice to have a penny of my own for our old Charon, instead of robbing *you*); it was such a heavenly evening! I first returned thanks that I was not gazing at the bishop, or peeping between the flowers at Colonel Blackett from the other side of a

sultry dinner table. Dear Oscar lay down by me with a sigh of content, and I opened my book. Somehow I could not attend to it; I began thinking—thinking of another story after the one I am finishing. Some excellent ideas came to me (I shall put *you* in it, Minty, and make you a perfect angel). I don't know how long I sat there—one gets over so many miles of thought in a few minutes—when I heard a step coming up behind me, not a heavy step like Evans', but Oscar did not bark, he stood up and smiled, with his ears—you know how dogs smile—and wagged his tail deliberately, then I heard Mr. Tremaine's voice say: 'So the wood nymph is in her haunt this beautiful evening.' Then he sat down and we had a nice long talk."

"What did you talk about?" asked Miss Parry, folding up her work thoughtfully.

"Of everything under the sun!—but not so much nonsense as usual. He looked at 'Esmond' (the book I had open on my knee), and he seemed to know all about Thackeray, so we discussed his characters, and agreed about them pretty well. He could not get over Esmond having married the mother of the girl he had been in love with—and *I* don't think it was nice. Then, somehow, I found myself talking of Ireland and France, and dear cousin Verner. Ah! shall I ever see her again? I am afraid I talked too much about myself, but he listened as if he were deeply interested. Indeed I could tell him almost anything. Then we laughed a good deal about the Freightsborough ball, and he told me about Malta, where he was quartered when he first joined his regiment. He went over to the coast of Greece, in somebody's yacht; to Albania, to shoot. The

people there are the descendants of the old Illyrians—think of that, Minty!”

“Yes! it is very remarkable,” said Miss Parry politely.

“It was all quite interesting. Then we walked a good way, by that tiny path along the river’s edge, and came back the same way. I did not think it was so late.”

“A great deal too late, my dear child!” said Miss Parry impressively. “Though he is very nice, we really know nothing about Mr. Tremaine, and however clear one’s conscience may be, it is most important that a girl should be *circumspect*, and give no occasion for talk!” Sybil thought for some instants, the colour slowly rising in her cheek and then dying away.

“I believe you are right, Minty! I will tell you why. When we came back to the ferry, Mr. Tremaine and I, he went on a few steps ahead and looked over the bank; then he said with a sort of satisfaction, ‘The boat is moored alongside, but the old man is having a pipe all alone on the landing. Now you are, comparatively, on your own territory, and have, I suppose, the key of the river gate, I may venture to leave you, and return by the common! I hope you never walk alone in those woods after dusk? If you *wish* to do so, pray remember *I* am always ready to share Oscar’s escort duty. I saw immediately that he thought it better we should not be seen together.”

“I am very glad, Sybil, that you take a sensible view of the matter. It would never do to attract attention—and if any gossip about you reached your grand-mamma’s ears, just think what a handle it would give her to——”

"Ah! Minty, you have betrayed yourself. You always maintain that Mrs. Rashleigh has no enmity to me, that she is only cold and reserved. Now, people are not afraid to 'give handles' to those whose judgment is kind and friendly."

"My dear child, you are too sharp. You have no right to misconstrue me. At all events, you see the necessity of prudence. You had better avoid Mr. Tremaine."

"Oh! that is too much to ask. I enjoy talking to him—it makes me feel alive! Then I can't help seeing that he thinks me *very* nice indeed! and that is so new, so delightful. I wonder if any one else will ever think as much of me? I feel grateful to him, you see, for having so high opinion of me. He puts me into good humour with myself."

"Really, Sybil, I am afraid you are growing vain. Believe me, there is nothing so safe as humility."

"I don't fancy ignominious safety. I don't like humility, I always associate it with 'Uriah Heep.' Conceit is contemptible in one direction, and humility in another. Now I shall steal away to bed; there I shall be quite out of the way. Shall you be able to escape to me soon?"

"Oh! yes, they will all be gone by eleven—at latest."

But Miss Parry's peace was spoiled for the present. Long after she had heard the carriages roll away, and during the weary time of waiting for that consummation, she thought with increasing anxiety of the new and alarming element in her life represented by Tremaine. He was a very pleasant attractive young man, good-

looking too, with a charming debonair manner, all of which qualities were so many counts in the indictment against him, in her estimation. He was unmistakably far gone in his admiration for Sybil. However he might guard his tongue, his eyes spoke volumes, while Sybil's liking for him terrified the kindly timid soul of Araminta still more. Personally inexperienced in love affairs, she had formed a romantic idea of the importance, the danger, the sorrows, which surround that special condition of the heart called being in love. She was slightly shocked by Sybil's outspoken liking for Tremaine, her avowed pleasure at his admiration. It was almost unmaidenly—and hitherto Sybil had always seemed modest to a degree—proudly modest, if such a term can be used. Now, if she was already so fascinated by this young man, what would become of her when he went away, as he probably would, and dropped out of her life altogether? For Sybil was poor and nearly friendless, and even the most chivalrous men did not often choose wives among girls so situated. Should she warn Sybil? She feared to rouse a certain vein of opposition and daring, which she well knew underlay her young friend's ordinary affectionate complaisance. "I had better hold my tongue, and try to keep in with her as much as possible! But, oh dear! if she grows too fond of that nice tiresome young man, it will break *my* heart to see her breaking hers!" was her last clear thought before sleep brought forgetfulness.

The day but one after her dinner was Mrs. Rashleigh's weekly at home day. An unusual number of visitors crowded the rooms, and Sybil came to Miss Parry's assistance in distributing tea. The company

was altogether feminine with the exception of Colonel Blackett, who enjoyed the "cup which cheers," &c. He bestowed his notice and conversation on Sybil, who was rather a favourite with him. She was obliged for his attention, for she was usually left to herself on these occasions.

"Are you going to the Freightsborough races, Miss Carew?"

"No! Colonel Blackett, I wish I were!"

"How is that?—Isn't grandmamma going?"

"I don't think so! I never knew her go to a race."

"No? And by-the-way, there's some talk of her going to the seaside, with Lady Elizabeth Rashleigh, the end of this month."

"Is she? I have heard nothing of it."

"Doesn't look as if you were on very confidential terms, eh?"

Sybil laughed. "She will announce her intention when she makes up her mind."

"Now, suppose you and Miss What's-her-name, who is making tea, come over. I'll escort you, see that you have good places, and all that sort of thing, hey? Make grandmamma's hair stand on end!"

"It would be quite delightful, and you are a dear for thinking of it! Pray excuse me for saying so."

"For calling me 'a dear.' Why of course I do! I'll be an inch or two higher all the week, thinking I am 'a dear' to such a charming girl. But won't you come? All the women are wild to see young Tremaine ride in the steeple-chase; they are laying no end of gloves on him. The way they spoil that boy is shame-

ful—though he gives them few chances. You really ought to see the fun.”

“Alas! there is no use in thinking of such a joy. Do not torture me by saying any more about it.”

“Well, it’s a pity! there are some capital jumps. I rather think they’ll puzzle——”

“Mr. Tremaine,” said the petrified parlour-maid.

“Gad! here he is,” ejaculated the Colonel.

With a swift glance round the room, Tremaine, who carried a small flat packet done up neatly in brown paper, advanced to Mrs. Rashleigh and greeted her with polite warmth. Then he drew a chair beside her and devoted himself to listen and talk to her with an air of profound attention.

“Won’t you take a cup of tea, Mr. Tremaine?” asked the old lady blandly.

“Presently, thank you! I want to show you these photographs first. MacIntyre is awfully sorry he could not bring them himself, but he was obliged to go over to Freightsborough on regimental business.” He unfolded and displayed six different views of the ruins.

Mrs. Rashleigh examined them most graciously. Then they were handed round, proving a godsend in the way of supplying a subject for conversation. This was greatly assisted by Colonel Blackett’s objection to one of them, as not representing the height of the east window faithfully.

Under cover of the babel which ensued, Tremaine approached the tea table. “Tell me,” he said in a low tone to Sybil, “is there any photograph of Mrs. Rashleigh?”

“Not here,” she returned. “She had one done for

Captain Rashleigh when he went to India, but I have never seen any about."

"Thanks," said Tremaine, and he went back to the lady of the house.

Sybil was surprised and nettled, a very little nettled that he had not come sooner to speak to her.

A lull in the discussion just then enabled her to hear his voice. "I don't see any photograph of you here, Mrs. Rashleigh, but I know Captain Rashleigh has rather a good one. I believe it always stood on his writing table at Peishawr."

A look of satisfaction stole over Mrs. Rashleigh's cold handsome face. Such a speech was the most gratifying testimony to the regard and affection entertained for her by her son, the future lord of Dene Court and head of the house—a magnate among the county magnates—and before such an audience too! The Bishop's wife and Mrs. Courteney, Miss Brereton, an accomplished promulgator of good and evil report, Mrs. Crosby, Lady Mary Wyndham, and last, not least, Colonel Blackett, besides many less important persons.

"I tell you how we'll decide the point," cried the latter gentleman. "With Mrs. Rashleigh's permission, we will go out and compare the photographs with the original."

"By all means," said Lady Mary, who opposed his views. "Come along, Colonel," and she rose.

"Sybil!" said Mrs. Rashleigh in an unusually amiable tone of voice. "Take Lady Mary to the ruins."

Whereupon there was an exodus of all the younger members to the grounds.

"It is really a charming spot," said Lady Mary.

"I wonder you do not persuade Mrs. Rashleigh to have tea out here among the ruins."

"I do not think she would like it," returned Sybil.

"Now just stand here, Lady Mary," exclaimed the Colonel, "and you, Mrs. Crosby. Tremaine! it was here, wasn't it, the camera was placed? Very well, just compare the photo. Why, it doesn't give any idea of the height!"

"I do not see the great difference," said Lady Mary. "I say it is an excellent photograph." And every one began to talk again.

"I have your photographs safe," said Tremaine, coming to where Sybil stood by the clustered shaft of an arch, part of which was still standing and a little apart from the rest. "I will give them to you another day. Did you get home without any let or hindrance? I was awfully annoyed not to be able to come with you the other evening."

"There was really no need."

"I had a good day's fishing yesterday," resumed Tremaine, "and a long talk with your friend Evans. He seems a capital fellow. He says his little girl has been restless again, and ventured to hope you would go and see her to-morrow or Saturday. I promised to ask you."

"I am not sure about to-morrow. We might manage to go on Saturday, for Mrs. Rashleigh dines with the Wyndhams, and starts early; it is a long drive. I think I can go on Saturday." Her eyes met Tremaine's as she said this, and she could not help laughing or blushing either at the eager questioning expression in his.

"I must go back and cultivate my friendship with

Mrs. Rashleigh," he said, smiling. "You are not going to Mrs. Crosby's musical party to-night, I suppose?"

"Me! No, certainly not. Do you not know by this time that I am imprisoned within invisible but impassable walls?"

"Perhaps not quite impassable," said Tremaine with a long look into her eyes; then went quickly away.

CHAPTER IX.

A CONFIDENTIAL TALK.

WITH her usual candour Sybil told Miss Parry that Evans had sent her a message about little Ju by Tremaine, adding, "So if Saturday is fine, we will go and see her, Minty." As she said so their eyes met, and Sybil laughed merrily at the look of distress and uneasiness which came into Araminta's. "Why are you unhappy, you silly old dear?" she asked, leaning back in her chair and laying down her pen (she was busy with the last chapter of her famous manuscript) to stretch out her hand to her mentor.

"I am not unhappy, Sybil."

"Then your looks belie you. Be truthful, Minty. What dreadful evil do you anticipate?"

"Well, dear, I do not anticipate evil, but it seemed to me very like an attempt on Mr. Tremaine's part to arrange a meeting at the keeper's lodge, which is not a wise proceeding."

"I did not think of it at the time, Minty, but as you have suggested it, why, I am inclined to think so too; and very nice and kind it is of him to wish to see me again. It quite cheers me up to find myself of any importance to one more human being besides your own good self. But *you* are number one on the list, and always will be. Give me a kiss this moment, then I

shall work steadily till dinner-time. The story is not winding up as well as I wish, but I will read it all to you—I mean the last chapters—this evening, that is, if Mrs. Rashleigh does not want you for a game of cribbage.”

And Sybil soon lost herself in the creations of her own fancy.

For the rest of the morning Mrs. Rashleigh kept her companion busily employed; moreover, she favoured her dependents with her company at early dinner, with the usual result, viz., that that meal passed in almost total silence. It was hardly over, and Mrs. Rashleigh was still looking through the “Lynchester Courant,” when the gate bell sounded, and soon after Mrs. Winter was announced.

“Where is she?” asked Mrs. Rashleigh, rising.

“In the library.”

And with a slight look of annoyance the lady of the house left the room.

“Rather unlike Mrs. Winter to call except on your grandmamma’s ‘at home’ days,” said Miss Parry, with an air of deep interest.

“Yes, it is a striking incident,” returned Sybil, who had lingered in the dining-room, vaguely feeling it was not polite to leave while Mrs. Rashleigh stayed.

“You have had a long morning, Minty,” she continued. “Can you come out with me this afternoon?”

“I don’t think I can. I have several commissions to do for Mrs. Rashleigh. Do you know she actually talks of going away for a month!”

“You don’t mean it, Minty!” cried Sybil, clasping

her hands in unmistakable joy; "but I hope—I *do* hope she is not going to take you with her?"

"Oh, no! there is no——"

"If you please, Miss Carew, will you come to Mrs. Rashleigh," interrupted the servant.

"Me!" ejaculated Sybil, much surprised.

"If you please, miss," and Sybil followed her.

She found the two ladies seated on the sofa—her grandmother's aspect considerably softened since she left the dining-room.

"Well, my dear! and how have you been?" began Mrs. Winter with kind cordiality. "It's an age since I saw you."

"It is indeed," returned Sybil. "You were out both the days I called."

"Yes, we are all sad gadabouts this fine weather. Now I hope you have no engagement for to-morrow?"

"No, indeed I have not, Mrs. Winter."

"Mrs. Winter is so very kind as to ask you to dinner," said Mrs. Rashleigh graciously; "and I am sure you will have great pleasure in going."

Sybil looked from one to the other and hesitated. A delightful vision of the woods and a joyous walk with Tremaine swept across her mental field of vision; but she banished it, knowing she must accept her fate, and gave her attention to Mrs. Winter, who was saying in her pleasant, fat sort of voice: "Georgy Playford has not been very well and is coming to us to-morrow with her brother, so I want you to dine and help to brighten us up. We'll have a little music; come as early as you can—no dressing necessary."

"Thank you," said Sybil slowly. "I shall be most

happy." There was rather a melancholy cadence in her voice.

"That's all right," said Mrs. Winter contentedly. "Now I must say good-bye, for I have a dozen places to go to."

"Always active and useful!" exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh with bland courtesy. "Ring the bell, Sybil! Good morning, Mrs. Winter, and many thanks for your kind thought of my rather morose grandchild"—this with a smile, which was soon changed when the visitor, accompanied by Sybil, departed.

"Come here!" called Mrs. Rashleigh in her most commanding tones, as Sybil passed the open door of the library. Sybil obeyed.

"I do not often interfere with you," began her grandmother, "for I am well aware how obstinately you adhere to your own ways and ideas; but on the present occasion I consider it to be my duty to give you a little advice. I suppose you are not so dull as to mistake Mrs. Winter's benevolent object in asking you so often to meet Mr. Robert Playford, her nephew?"

"Yes, I think I understand," said Sybil carelessly.

"I am glad you admit so much," resumed her grandmother; "and I wish to impress upon you the necessity for prudence and tact at this crisis in your fortune. Young Playford is a steady business man; do not scare him away by objectionable airs or flippant manners. It is very important that you should secure so good a settlement."

"I do not like to encourage false hopes," returned Sybil, with a peculiarly composed voice, in which Tremaine would probably have detected a tinge of satire,

"so I feel bound to tell you that I think I have, unconsciously, scared him already. He is not at all happy in my society."

"Then you have committed some unpardonable piece of folly," cried Mrs. Rashleigh indignantly, her dark brows almost meeting in a frown. "What do you mean by such folly? Is there anything before you but beggary and dependence, that you turn from such a chance of respectability?"

"I shall not always be dependent," said Sybil, her heart swelling with a sudden pity for herself at being thus trampled upon—a cruel sense of her helplessness, and for the time being a detestably weak tendency to a passionate fit of crying; "I could earn my bread if you would permit me, but I shall not be a minor always."

"And I have been annoyed and imposed upon sufficiently without the additional mortification of seeing my relative displaying her inefficiency in some degrading position," returned Mrs. Rashleigh, with more heat than she had ever shown before to her offending grandchild. "But for me you would be starving in the streets, and it is your duty to relieve me of a burden I have so long borne."

"You shall be relieved, I promise," cried Sybil, stung into self-possession and composure, "before long, in some way or other. I feel I owe you many apologies for being alive; but at least I did not ask to be brought into this world, nor has life brought me any great advantage. Nevertheless, for giving me a chance of keeping body and soul together, I owe you a return of some kind, so I will promise you that when Mr. Robert Playford *asks* me to marry him I will say yes."

"Ha! there is some trick in your promise, Sybil; you are audacious enough to defy me, but you will do yourself no good," and the harsh old woman rose, intending to retire to her own room.

"I do not want to defy you or to displease you," said Sybil sadly, her tone and mood changing suddenly; "but I can never *please* you, because you dislike me—why I cannot tell. Did you hate my poor mother—your own daughter? Can I help being here? If I am so offensive in your eyes let me go. It will not cost you much to find me some engagement where I can——"

"I have no time to listen to such sentimental maundering," broke in Mrs. Rashleigh, pushing rudely past her and leaving the room.

Some time later Miss Parry, going to look for Sybil, found the door of her room locked, and was kept waiting a moment or two before she was admitted. She found Sybil in outdoor array.

"What *is* the matter—are you not well, dear?"

"No, Minty; I am ill—with a fit of bad temper and too much grandmother."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Mrs. Rashleigh and I having indulged in a *tête-à-tête*, we almost came to blows. Now I feel better, so I am going to see Mrs. Price and play with the children to restore my mental tone. Will you come down later?"

"I will if I can, but I have various things to do."

"Well, do not expect me to tea. I wish"—clenching her hands—"I was never again to taste food in this house. I could not live here at all if it were not for

you!" So saying, she snatched up her gloves and ran downstairs.

Sybil was always welcome in the curate's house. No child among the numerous olive branches enjoyed a game of play more than she did, while capable fingers were always at Mrs. Price's service to mend or make or "cut out." Indeed, her happiest hours hitherto had been spent in the somewhat pinched household. She profoundly respected the good housewife's high-hearted struggle with poverty, and she was proud to be of the smallest use to her and hers. It was this feeling which made her prefer the curate's to the banker's house, grateful as she was to Mrs. Winter for her many "good turns;" but to most generous natures "It is more blessed to give than to receive." She did not perhaps know how valuable were the lessons taught her in that humble household; but the example of courage and patience, self-denial and self-respect, entered into her soul and dwelt there.

In this bracing atmosphere she forgot the bitterness and anger roused by Mrs. Rashleigh's brutal speeches, by her antagonistic manner. Things were brighter than usual in the clerical family. The eldest boy had been given a berth on board a large trading vessel, and as his longing had always been for a "life on the ocean wave," it was hoped that a suitable career was opened to him. The question of outfit, therefore, absorbed the mother and young aunt, and Sybil eagerly volunteered to assist in the shirt-making, running the heels and toes of socks, and such-like humble tasks, her "cutting-out" capacities being strictly limited to feminine prettinesses. This important topic kept her at the council-board in

the parlour, while the school-room pined for her as a compromise or rather a compensation. Sybil, at the substantial five o'clock "tea," while the thick slices of bread, thinly buttered for those fastidious members who did not care for an ample supply of "golden syrup," mustards, cress and radishes from the children's own bits of garden, vanished swiftly, proposed that the whole party should accompany her to see little Ju Evans, and return by the ferry—a splendid treat, as the penny fare was not (usually) to be lightly undertaken.

She could thus give pleasure to her young friends, and see her poor little favourite, as she could not manage her promised visit the next day. The proposition was hailed with applause, and in half an hour they were under weigh. "Let us take them all ourselves," said Sybil to Charlotte. "Jim will help us with the perambulator. Then nurse can stay at home and help Mrs. Price. Baby and Bobby *may* fall asleep coming home, but we will cover them up well. There is only one bad place going, and we can lift the perambulator over it. The path through the woods is all clear."

Jim, a stout boy of thirteen, was not too willingly pressed into the service, but then he could not say no to Sybil.

Oscar, who had been waiting patiently at the back door, was summoned, and all started in high glee, down the steep street, over the bridge and along the dusty road for a few hundred yards till they reached an opening in the low fence or ridge which separated the highway from the common.

They had not proceeded far, Sybil having relieved Jim to let him run races with his two sisters and younger

brother, in which sport they were joyously joined by Oscar, when three men on horseback came round a bend of the road. The one next the common was Tremaine, next him was MacIntyre, the third was Captain Brooke. They were returning from a distant visit to Deerham Castle—a residence second in importance only to Bobingham—and were chatting lightly of the people they had met there, and of the various rumours respecting the owner, a very sporting baronet. Suddenly Tremaine's quick eye caught sight of the group crossing the open towards the woods.

"Don't stop for me," he said hastily to his friends, "I'll catch you up before you are over the bridge." Reining back his horse, he turned, leaped the low bank, and galloped towards the party, two of whom he had recognized.

"Come back, Janey; take care, Evan," cried Miss Price to the wandering children. "Here is a runaway horse."

Sybil turned to look in some fear. "Oh, no! It is not running away," she said.

The next minute Tremaine pulled up beside her and dismounted. "Good evening, Miss Carew; good evening, Miss Price," he said, looking radiant with pleasure at this unexpected meeting. "May I ask where you are conducting this covey?"

"I am going to see little Ju—as you said she wanted me," returned Sybil, smiling a welcome to him. "And Miss Price and all these young people are going with me."

"Isn't this a round?" he asked.

"It is, that is what we want."

"Shall you return by the ferry?" eagerly.

"Yes."

"All right, I'll see you again."

He sprang on his horse and dashed off after his comrades, clearing the fence into the road in gallant style.

"*What* a nice man!"

"What a lovely horse!"

"And didn't he jump beautifully. Oh, wouldn't *I* like to have a horse that would jump like that," chorused Jim and the children.

The rest of the walk was most enjoyable. Bobby was permitted to descend from the perambulator and collect leaves, ferns, stones and much interesting rubbish. Even Baby—a two year old—managed to toddle a little way.

The joy of little Ju to see and play with children of her own age and younger was great. The hospitable Mrs. Evans had slices of home-made cake for all. Then came the moment of parting, with many promises of coming again, Bobby and Baby were carefully wrapped up, Oscar, with a fine discrimination which way duty led, constituted himself guardian of the perambulator, and they started for the ferry, sometimes singing, always talking.

About half way, near the place where the tiny track of Sybil's favourite haunt branched off, a man's figure was descried approaching, and they were confronted by Tremaine, upon whom Oscar bestowed the most flattering recognition.

"Considering the size of your column you have

made a capital advance," he exclaimed. "I expected to come up with you much further from the base of your operations," and he turned with them, talking chiefly with Miss Price or telling some nonsensical fairy tale to the children, and good-humouredly taking his turn with the perambulator.

Under such conditions the way seemed short, and the ferry was reached only too soon. There was some fuss in putting the children on board, and old Charon was quite interested. Tremaine gallantly paid all the required pennies, and there was much laughing about the perambulator, which the ferryman said was a four-wheeled carriage. By this time the children were growing somewhat silent and tired, so they reached home ready for rest and well content.

'Good-nights' being exchanged and the door closed, Tremaine observed, "Now I must see *you* safe home."

"It will take you out of your way, for I have brought the key of the river gate."

"I have no way at present save one," he said.

"Which is that?" asked Sybil quite unconsciously.

"Yours," was the emphatic reply.

They walked on in silence till they reached the river. The soft shadows of a fine though not a moonlit night were falling over city and stream, the curfew was sending forth its sweet solemn dirge over the dying day, calling the weary to home and to rest, and all polite Lynchester was near the end of its second course.

"So you are not going to see the keeper's little daughter to-morrow?" began Tremaine abruptly, not to say reproachfully.

"No, I cannot, that is the reason I took the children there this evening."

"And why can't you go to-morrow?"

"I am obliged to dine with Mrs. Winter, she came to ask me herself, and I did not like to refuse, besides——"

What there was "besides" never appeared, for Tremaine broke out in absolute dismay, "Great heavens! and *I* have refused her invitation, hoping for a walk back with you from Evans' lodge! I am thoroughly sold."

Sybil laughed unsympathetically. "Isn't it funny?" she exclaimed. "Have you quite refused? I am so sorry, for I don't think we shall be very lively, though my friend the brilliant and amusing Mr. Playford is to be of the party."

"What, that cad?" exclaimed Tremaine in tones of disgust. "Well, it is a confounded nuisance! I can't go and say to Mrs. Winter, 'I have made a mistake, please let me come to dinner to-morrow.' You are really unkind to laugh at me."

"No," returned Sybil, "I never intend to be unkind, but I suppose I am cross and unreasonable sometimes. By the way, when do *you* dine? I imagine you ought to be dining now."

"Oh, my dinner is a movable feast," said Tremaine, "and I had a gorgeous luncheon at Deerham Castle."

Talking lightly they reached the ferry. The boat was in mid-stream on its way to the opposite side. The stars were now showing themselves as the darkness deepened, and were faintly mirrored in the water, the soft stillness, the perfumed air coming from the masses

of gorse on the other side, completed the charm of this (to Tremaine) delicious *tête-à-tête*. They stood for a moment watching the boat working its slow way across.

The stars, scarce peering forth, and dim and few,
Their pale faint lustre o'er our standard threw;

murmured Sybil. "Only you and I have no standard," she added.

"I don't know those lines," said Tremaine.

"They are in Schiller's 'Wallenstein'—not that I know German," said Sybil; "I found them in Madame de Stael's 'De l'Allemagne;' I daresay the original is very different."

"*Must* you go in?" asked Tremaine, looking at her with imploring eyes as they drew near the gate into the Priory grounds. "Will Mrs. Rashleigh be *very* uneasy if you do not return just yet?"

Sybil laughed. "She will not know if I am at home or abroad. Miss Parry *might* trouble herself if she knew I was wandering about in the dusk."

"Miss Parry," he repeated. "She gives me the impression of being all goodness and unselfishness."

"She is indeed," returned Sybil with a sigh.

"Then," urged Tremaine; "do come a little further; the evening is so fine, and I am so unlucky as to have no chance of seeing you to-morrow. Let us stroll to the end of the path."

"Yes! It is very pleasant here, I will come," returned Sybil with frank acquiescence. The path extended very little further than the boundary of the Priory grounds, for in the previous winter a flood in the river had swept away part of the narrow margin which intervened be-

tween the high bank and the water, so that the footway stopped abruptly on the edge of a sudden rift.

Very near this break was a long bench, placed there by the late Mr. Rashleigh, in an exceptional fit of public spirit. It was now bleached and cracked with sun and wind and long neglect; the pathway was rarely used and was partially overgrown by grass and weeds. Reaching the bench Sybil sat down and Tremaine took his place beside her, stealing a glance at her thoughtful, even sad face; a bar of light across the western sky opposite, the last reflection of the vanished sun, enabled him to see her expression.

"Will you think me very audacious if I say that you seem to me not quite yourself?" asked Tremaine almost timidly. "You have had no bad news?"

"No!" said Sybil, drawing off her gloves to tie some violets the children had given her together with some of the long grass that grew near; "I never have any news, but I had rather a bad attack to-day, and I have hardly toned down yet."

"An attack!" echoed Tremaine in great surprise. "You were not ill, I hope?"

"No! It was an attack of indignation and ill-temper."

"Indignation! Who annoyed or vexed you? I don't suppose you are an angel, but I am sure you are not ill-tempered."

"It is too long a story to tell—my grandmother is a little eccentric and annoys me sometimes; these sort of things occur in the best-regulated families, I suppose. Let us talk of something more agreeable."

"By all means! Is there any chance of your coming over to the steeplechase?"

"None, I am sorry to say. Tell me, is it not rather dangerous; I mean, this kind of race?"

"No, by no means, if you have a good horse and know how to ride. I am sure of the first, for I shall ride the Colonel's 'Blackamoor,' a capital horse, but not known at all. I hope to make a pot of money, for there are heavy odds against him. I am going over to Freightsborough on Monday, to go over the course. I don't expect to return till Thursday."

Sybil asked a few more questions about racing and betting, then silence fell upon them—a delightful sympathetic silence, which was broken by a remonstrance from Oscar, who had sat patiently beside his mistress unnoticed, and now, with a mixture of a groan and a whine, laid an imploring paw on her lap.

"Poor dear doggie!" said Sybil tenderly. "He is a little jealous. Yes, Oscar, your mistress loves you dearly. Oscar was my first friend in Mrs. Rashleigh's house when I came from France, long ago; there was no Miss Parry then to give me any comfort. Oh! I was a miserable little creature."

"I suppose so," said Tremaine, hoping to lead her on.

"Then I saved his life! Captain Rashleigh was so cruel to the dog. That is one of the reasons I dislike him so much. Oscar was quite a puppy and my only pleasure was playing with him. One day he was kicked—Brian Rashleigh had two horses here then, just before he went to India—Oscar's fore-leg was badly broken. I heard him crying and ran to the stable to see what was

the matter. I found the groom taking him to be drowned or killed in some way, and the poor thing whined and tried to get to me, and his eyes said 'Save me,' as plainly as if he had spoken the words. I said to myself, '*I will.*' So I cried to the groom not to do anything till I had asked Brian to spare him, and I ran out into the lane where he was just mounting his horse. Though I hated speaking to him, I cried and begged for Oscar's life, and said *I* would take care of him; but Brian, who seemed cross (he generally was), said 'Oh nonsense, the dog isn't worth his food, I cannot be cumbered with half-bred trash. You'd better keep out of the way, or you'll get a kick yourself,' and he rode off. I went back half wild with grief and rage; *how* I wished I had had a whip and were a man to thrash Brian; he had always treated me as if *I* were a mere kitten or puppy and not worth my food. Then I begged and prayed the groom to let me have the dog. He hesitated and reminded me that his master would brook no disobedience, but he was not bad at heart, and when I sobbed and said I had nothing to give him, he cried 'There, miss, you shall have him, and I'll set the leg for you if you will hold him, and then keep him out of sight.' So I held the poor dog—yes, Oscar, I am talking of you, dear—and oh! I thought I should have fainted. I took him and hid him in my own room for two whole days, till that tyrannical, cruel Brian Rashleigh was gone. Then poor old Dumbledon took him to the stables and was very good to him. Of course my grandmother always thought he was Brian's dog, so she let him stay on. I am quite sure Oscar knew I would help him, I shall never forget the trusting look of

his eyes. Oh! what shall I do when I go away, for I shall not be able to take him with me."

"Going away!" echoed Tremaine, who had listened with profoundest interest, and was greatly moved by the varying tones, the tenderness, the fire, the pathos of her voice. "Where are you going?"

"Oh! I do not know. But as soon as I am twenty-one I am going. I wonder—don't think me odd or—or audacious—if you are in England, if—if you would take him?"

"I would accept anything from *you* with gratitude," said Tremaine, in a low voice.

"He seems to like you, poor dear old Oscar," drawing his head on to her lap and stroking it. "You must let me know where you are. Let me see, a year and ten months from this time. But, after all, Oscar is not mine; nothing is mine," she ended, somewhat gravely.

"I should be inclined to think that everything must be yours, for the asking," said Tremaine, battling with a wild and (he told himself) foolish desire to avow his ardent admiration for her, but warned by a delicate perception that this confidential moment was not the one in which to intrude himself upon her notice. Then his affairs were anything but flourishing, and he had no business to dream of asking any one to marry him. Marriage indeed had always been the remotest probability to him, a sort of last resource in middle age. Warm and tender as his feelings for Sybil had grown, he was half inclined to laugh at himself for so serious a thought. Besides, though so friendly and confidential,

she was not the least in love with him, but she might be.

These thoughts flashed through his mind as he resumed his usual tone, with some effort.

"At all events I will keep you informed of my whereabouts, and hold myself in readiness to take charge of Oscar whenever you choose to confide him to my care. But in return *you* must let me know *your* destination when you leave the Priory. Any chance of your going to London?"

"I do not know—I might go to Australia."

"Australia!" repeated Tremaine in dismay. "What could possibly take you to Australia?"

"Because the only friends and relatives I have are there. But I have not heard of them for ages; perhaps they have forgotten me. But I have not forgotten them—they were too good, too dear, to be forgotten. Oh! how I envy you. You are free and happy. I wish I were a man. Then I could live alone and work my way up. But I am talking nonsense, and it is getting late. I have kept you too long, Mr. Tremaine, with my retrospective grumblings. Come, Oscar, we must go home." She stood up; Tremaine did not attempt to detain her.

"I shall present myself at Mrs. Rashleigh's on Thursday," he said, as they paused at the gate. "Till then I fear I shall not see you, unless you happen to go to the Cathedral on Sunday?"

"If it is fine, I shall," returned Sybil, putting the key into the gate; "good-night." She held out her un-

gloved hand, and Tremaine, with an impulse he could not resist, bent over and kissed it.

"Good-night—sweet sleep to you," he said, in a low tone.

Sybil laughed in some slight embarrassment. "Have we gone back to the days of Sir Charles Grandison?" she exclaimed, and vanished into the darkness of the shrubbery beyond.

CHAPTER X.

"IN EDEN."

THE next day proved wet and blustering, as if a coarse, ugly patch had been cut from October to disfigure the fair texture of May's last hours, and Sybil expressed her contentment thereat to her friend Araminta. "You see, we could not have gone out in such weather, so I may as well dine with Mrs. Winter."

"Certainly, dear! And do you know Mrs. Rashleigh has ordered a fly to be sent for if the rain continues, that you may go comfortably."

"Is it possible? She must have hopes of Willie Playford, if she is going to spend money on me. Well, Minty! I am going to reduce that poor young man to abject terror this evening. I shall make love to him. He is awfully afraid of vexing his uncle and aunt, and he knows they want him to marry me, dear old things! It is their kind generous wish to provide for me, I am sure. Heaven knows, not for my fortune. I am sure that poor young man has a sweetheart they would not approve of somewhere, and is desperately afraid of being drawn into an engagement with me. Really a man ought to be able to stand up for himself."

"Ah, Sybil! it is very hard if one is poor to stand up against rich relatives."

"I suppose it is—yet, if I were a man——But it

is wicked to talk when I ought to be writing, and I don't seem able to finish."

The occupants of Lynchester Castle were all deeply interested in the coming race, which formed the chief subject of conversation whenever two or three were gathered together.

Major MacIntyre, who did not risk much money on events of this kind, being less absorbed, noticed that his favourite Tremaine was graver and more thoughtful than he had ever known him to be before—though intensely earnest in his preparations for the coming race.

"The lad is far gone about that young creature at the Priory, and what's the use? He is in debt and she has no money. He'd better take a month's leave and try change of air and scene—to say nothing of a new love. The homœopathic system is the best cure for an inflamed heart. I'll insinuate the notion, though he won't stand much interference. Anyhow, nothing can be done till the race is over."

So time went swiftly on and the date fixed for Mrs. Rashleigh's departure drew near. During these weeks Tremaine never failed to present himself on Mrs. Rashleigh's reception days, so the "upper ten" of Lynchester became quite accustomed to the idea that he was a regular *habitué* of the house, and when by chance they met him escorting Miss Parry and Sybil home from the Cathedral, or walking with the latter in Bridge Street, it seemed quite right and natural.

But society in general knew nothing of the frequent wanderings in the woods, where sometimes Sybil only, and more often Sybil and her faithful companion, met the persevering young fisherman, rod in hand, either

going to or coming from the trout stream. This, however, is anticipating.

Miss Parry read aloud, with some excitement, a brilliant account of the Monkswell steeplechase, between officers of the army and gentlemen of the county, in the *Lynchester Courant*, and tears of pleasure stood in Sybil's eyes as she listened to the announcement that after a closely contested race Lieutenant Tremaine, Rifle Rangers, on Colonel Wardell's "Blackamoor," won by a length.

"I am so glad," she cried. "His heart seemed so set upon it, and I imagine he will win a great deal of money."

"I am sorry to think that he bets on horses."

"Yes! so am I. It is foolish; but I suppose they all do, and I do not fancy Mr. Tremaine is wiser than his neighbours."

Tremaine was the hero of the hour, and in the highest spirits. He was made much of when he appeared at the Priory the last day Mrs. Rashleigh was to be "at home" till her return from the seaside.

The stately lady of the house herself deigned to read him a smiling lecture on the dangers of betting and horse-racing, which he received with the sweetest humility.

Lady Elizabeth and Miss Rashleigh were among the visitors, and Sybil, who was on her best behaviour, for she believed in Lady Elizabeth's kind intentions, devoted herself to the elegant Aline.

Miss Rashleigh was a very refined, colourless young person, most carefully dressed, and perfectly correct in speech and manner—so unmistakeably a model, that

no one ever expected to find any human sympathetic failings in her. Yet she was not unfeeling or negligent of her poorer neighbours; indeed, she performed all her duties most rigidly.

Of Sybil she had a distinct impression which conveyed an idea of rebellion and heterodoxy; but nevertheless it was her duty to bear with this erring sister patiently and politely.

"Did you enjoy your visit to London?" asked Sybil, when she had supplied her with tea and cake.

"Very much; of course I was glad to return home, as my mother must have missed me."

"I am sure she did. Did you go to many theatres?"

"No! we only went once to the Lyceum. There was so much to be done, and I believe the other theatres are not very nice."

"Oh, yes! the Adelphi is delightful. I was taken there when I was staying with one of my school-fellows. Then, when I was in Paris, I went to the Théâtre Français and the Gymnase. Ah! how charming both were. I am afraid I am forgetting my French and would scarcely be able to follow a French play now."

"You should read it every day," replied Miss Rashleigh.

"I wish I could, but there are very few French books in the house."

"That is a pity!" A dead silence.

"Would you like to come out and walk round the ruins?" was Sybil's next effort. "Mrs. Rashleigh has had some flower-beds made within the walls. They are very pretty."

"Yes; I am told the effect is excellent," chimed in

Tremaine, who had been listening with some amusement.

"Thank you," said Miss Rashleigh rising. "We are going to look at the ruins," she said to her mother, "but I shall not be long."

"May I come, too?" asked Tremaine.

"Certainly," replied Sybil; and Tremaine made himself as agreeable as he could to the daughter of Dene Court, who listened with well-bred attention, and expended as few words as possible in reply. Once he caught Sybil's eyes, and raised his own brows, with a comic expression of despair at the difficulty of his self-imposed task.

"Those old monks certainly had an eye for the picturesque," he said, "but *what* a miserable life they must have had, at a time too when sport and fighting were the only pursuits for men."

"I imagine they made a good deal of work for themselves," returned Sybil. "I have read about them in a funny but interesting old book, the history of Lynchester. They used to keep registers of the land, and then they wrote records and illuminated missals, and taught (some of them, at least); then they had the excitement of quarrelling with other abbeyes and priories, and going to law with them, to say nothing of battling with the devil, which must have been the worst part of it."

As Sybil unhesitatingly pronounced this vulgar and appalling name, Tremaine saw a look of pained disgust pass over the immaculate countenance of the fair Aline. "I think," she said, "I had better return. I must not keep my mother waiting."

They therefore returned to the house, being joined on the way by Oscar, who evidently annoyed Miss Rashleigh by brushing against her dress as he bounded to welcome Tremaine. Lady Elizabeth was ready to leave, and went to the gate, followed by Tremaine.

"We leave to-morrow for Devonshire," she said, "and dear Mrs. Rashleigh will join us next week. I trust the change will do her good—she looks a little fagged and anxious. I am sure you and Miss Parry will do everything you can to save her from worry."

"Yes, Lady Elizabeth; but I did not know she worried," replied Sybil—an imprudent speech—but she could not keep back the words.

When the Dene Court carriage rolled away, Sybil turned back into the grounds, saying, "I have done my duty. I shall not return to the drawing-room."

"Poor Miss Rashleigh!" exclaimed Tremaine, keeping by her side, "you administered an awful shock to her. Did you see how she shrank from your blasphemous mention of His Satanic Majesty? I expected to hear her cry out to 'Angels and ministers of grace' for protection."

"Why was she so shocked?"

"Well, it is not exactly conventional. I am afraid you are very Bohemian, Miss Carew. Tell me—when does Mrs. Rashleigh leave?"

"This day week," cried Sybil joyously.

"Then we will start a picnic to Beauchamp Towers, and get Mrs. Winter to come."

"I am afraid Mrs. Winter is very differently engaged. Her niece, Miss Playford, is dangerously ill with typhoid

fever. She was not well when she came, and now she is very ill indeed. I was there late last evening, and the accounts were rather bad."

"Very sorry to hear it. You don't go into the house, I hope?" added Tremaine gravely.

"No, I do not, for I should not see Mrs. Winter if I did. I do hope the poor girl will soon throw off the terrible fever. She is very nice and quiet—quite a different sort of quietness from Miss Rashleigh's."

"The wildest stretch of imagination could not depict Miss Rashleigh developing anything so warm and human as a fever," returned Tremaine.

"I am sure I hope she will not," said Sybil, smiling. "Do you know, I really believe they intend to marry her to Brian Rashleigh."

"Indeed! I shouldn't fancy such a *fille de marbre* for a wife."

"She isn't a bit too marble for *him*—she is too good," replied Sybil gravely.

"Ah, Miss Carew, I am afraid you are very unforgiving. I shouldn't like to offend you."

"I wonder if I am unforgiving? I don't think I am—that is, I would not hurt any one who had offended me. I simply hate the sight of them."

"Great powers!" cried Tremaine, with tragic emphasis. "Isn't that punishment enough?"

"Well, I don't hate the sight of *you* yet, so you need not mind," said Sybil with a bright smile and a fascinating little nod. "Now I shall say good-bye. I shall not waste any more time in that sepulchral drawing-room, for I have work to do."

"I cannot imagine *what* you have to do," exclaimed

Tremaine, anxious to prolong the brief *tête-à-tête*. "Are you making clothes for poor old women?"

"Not at present, though I very often do for a poor young one. Some day, if you are *very* good and I think you can keep a secret, I will tell you."

"Ah! I shall at once be many inches taller if you deign to confide in me," cried Tremaine, gazing at her with loving eyes.

"Well, we'll see," she returned, the colour rising in her soft cheek; "so good-bye again," and she went quickly into the house without giving him her hand.

Tremaine returned to the drawing-room and made himself generally agreeable, and to Miss Parry especially useful, for the next quarter of an hour. Then he escaped—to stroll meditatively round the walls, and think; to recall every word Sybil had just uttered, with every intonation of the voice that was music to his ear, and in truth very pleasant to ears which were not a lover's. "I am certain that grinning old ogress of a grandmother is unkind to her. She is not happy. I wish to heaven I could take her out of it all. What a paradise life would be with her always beside you, though the darling has a decided liking for her own way! I wonder if she would ever love me as well as I love her? I fear not, only she, if she once began to care for a fellow, she'd go in deep enough. The very way she strokes that dog's head and presses it to her is full of tenderness. She has plenty of pluck, too. I'd like to see her meet Rashleigh; I suspect he'd catch it about Oscar. She is mistaken, though, as regards him; he is not a bad fellow. Of course I shall not argue with her on the subject; that would never do.

How will it all end? My God! I cannot face the idea of parting from her! If I must, better, a thousand times better, that she should not care a rap for me!"

* * * * *

The following week began what was the first real holiday Sybil and her beloved "Minty" had known for more than two years.

Mrs. Rashleigh departed, taking her favourite Stone, the parlour-maid, as her personal attendant. She left in a fairly amiable mood. She had arranged an elaborate scale of expenditure with Miss Parry—nicely calculated to allow of the smallest possible margin—she had made out a list of cleanings, renovations, repairs and alterations which might occupy a dozen pairs of hands, and her last words to her granddaughter were, "If you are capable of assisting Miss Parry I shall be thankful, though I fear your Irish blood rather unfits you for useful work." The carriage began to roll away, and so the sharp reply that rose readily to Sybil's lips remained unspoken.

"Thank heaven!" she said, turning to Miss Parry, "I have a chance of three weeks' unbroken good temper."

"My dear, you really should not mind your grand-mamma's eccentricities. Her bark is worse than her bite."

"I don't at all agree with you. Her bark is detestable, but her bite is worse. And I must bear it for eighteen long months! *Then*, Minty, you and I will elope together."

"Where to?" asked Miss Parry, laughing.

"Into Hungary, I suspect," returned Sybil. "Come, Oscar, we'll have a run round, then I'll go and ask

how Georgie Playford is going on. I am so thankful she is coming round. Poor dear Mrs. Winter has had a bad time."

"And I must go and settle about the whitewashing, and engage Mrs. Scruball, for we never can do all Mrs. Rashleigh wants without help."

"What! and pay for it yourself? for you know you dare not put it in the accounts."

"Yes, I will—part of it, at least," said Miss Parry stoutly. "Well, I will share the rest. Remember I am a millionaire."

What halcyon days ensued. What heavenly freedom from the late afternoon when Miss Parry and Sybil struck work and read or talked, and made long excursions on foot. Then how peaceful the evenings were! Sybil read the ending of her story, over which Araminta laughed and cried, and prophesied immense success for the author. Then Sybil with her friend's help counted the words in a column of "Jack and Jill," and compared the number with those in her own pages, discovering to her delight that if accepted her present story would make eight or nine times as much copy as her first attempt. Then the finding of a title, the packing the manuscript and sending it (registered) to that mighty Jove, the editor, how exciting it all was!

It is not to be supposed that Tremaine absented himself all this time—far from it. The day after Mrs. Rashleigh's departure he arrived in the afternoon with photographs of the ruins for Miss Parry and Sybil; then they had tea under the shelter of the Priory wall, and he had finally to be turned out by Miss Parry. Then the promised picnic took place. The party consisted

of Mr. and Mrs. Price, Miss Price, Sybil and her faithful chaperon, MacIntyre and Tremaine the hosts, and, to the astonishment of all save Sybil, Playford. She had made a discovery, or thought she had, that the curate's quiet sister was the real source of his fear of herself. Above all there were many *tête-à-tête* roamings round the ruins and through the woods, and altogether Tremaine was inclined to sigh with Moore, "And oh! if there be an elysium on earth! It is this, it is this."

As soon as her niece was fit to be moved, Mrs. Winter took her away for change of air, and did not return for some months, so Sybil and Miss Parry were left to their own devices. The latter had grown accustomed to Tremaine's presence; moreover, she had also grown to like him—still she had had quarters of an hour every now and then when she thought of the uncertainty of such a very decided flirtation and the possible misery in which it might end. Still she had not the courage to stem the current which was quite too much for her; so the weeks went by—all too quickly.

At last, one fine morning, came a note from the editor, which Sybil kissed with rapture. "Listen, dearest Minty. Isn't this delightful? 'Dear madam'—(I feel fifty at least)—'I have read your story, 'and am happy to offer you twenty-five pounds for all 'rights, to be paid in three instalments at intervals of 'two months, beginning one month after publication of 'the first two portions. Hoping for a favourable reply, 'I have the honour to be, madam, yours faithfully, 'J. R., editor "Jack and Jill."'—Oh! Minty, dear! Isn't it lovely?" Kissing her. "Twenty-five and three are twenty-eight. Oh, dearest old Minty, in another

year I shall have more than thirty pounds, for I will write Oscar's story next; it will be a splendid subject, and I will make Brian Rashleigh a perfect fiend."

"It is indeed delightful, but quite what I expected, my dear, dear child," cried Araminta, the tears in her eyes. "I am so thankful for such good fortune."

"So am I," said Sybil softly, with downcast eyes; then suddenly raising them, with an arch look, exclaimed, "Ah, Minty, if this goes on we are more likely to elope to Turkey than to Hungary. But what does he mean by 'all rights?'"

"I am sure I don't know."

"No matter," continued Sybil; "I would sell him anything for twenty-five pounds. I must write him a nice letter."

"Don't seem too pleased, my dear," advised the artful Araminta. "*I* have a letter from Mrs. Rashleigh; she desires me to go to Freightsborough at once to get new cocoanut matting for the passages down stairs and some curtains; she has seen an advertisement of Jackson and Barfield's in the *Lynchester Courant* announcing great bargains. I had better go by the eleven fifteen train; then I can get back by six, and you will read me your letter; don't send it away before I see it, for *I* know the world better than you do."

"Very well, Minty. Be *sure* you have a good luncheon in Freightsborough, and put it to the house account."

"I am afraid, Sybil——"

"Oh, nonsense! '*Never* fear,' as the Irish car drivers always say."

"Well, I shall just go and give some directions to

cook before I go. You will be rather lonely—would you like to come with me?”

“No, thank you; I do not like Freightsborough. I shall finish the curtain you were making and plan some more stories.”

Araminta therefore descended to the lower regions, where she not only gave directions to cook, but cautioned the housemaid that if Mr. Tremaine happened to call she was to say that Miss Parry had gone over to Freightsborough. “He will no doubt understand that he ought not to come in, for he has a good deal of tact,” she thought, as she uttered the injunction.

“Very well, ma’am,” returned Mary.

“Much he’ll mind that,” was *her* mental comment.

After a morning of steady work Sybil thought herself entitled to some relaxation, and calling Oscar she strolled round the garden, venturing to gather some roses, which she fastened at the collar and waistband of her fresh print dress, with that love of dainty prettiness which was ever uppermost with her whether she were alone or among her fellows.

Then, with the deliberate intention of idling and dreaming, she placed herself on a kind of rustic sofa within the Priory, opposite an archway which framed in a beautiful peep of wood and stream and distant hills. Here the old wall and some trees partially protected her from the afternoon sun, though his light gradually pierced the traceried window and filtered through the gently stirring leaves, touching her bright chestnut hair with gold. It was a happy hopeful hour; occasionally she spoke to Oscar, who listened with grave consideration; but chiefly she built castles in the air.

Presently Oscar pricked up his ears, rose, and went towards the house; then footsteps were heard, and Tremaine appeared with a parcel of periodicals in his hand.

"So Miss Parry has deserted you," he exclaimed, "your servant informed me, rather with the air of warning me off the premises, but I felt bound to deliver these magazines myself. Now I am here I suppose I may stay?"

"Oh, yes, of course," returned Sybil, with sweet smiling eyes.

Tremaine gazed earnestly at her as he sat down.

"You have had some good news," he said; "you look as radiant as if you were listening to 'Peals of merry music from the belfry of your heart.'"

"What a pretty idea—where is that line?"

"Oh, I don't know; it caught my ear some time long ago. But seriously, you look perfectly radiant."

"Yes, I am very happy—which I am *not* always."

"May I not know why?" pleaded Tremaine, who did not seem in his usual good spirits.

"I shall tell all about it if you will promise not to laugh at me."

"I promise—indeed I do not feel like laughing to-day."

"Then the source of my joy is a letter from a gentleman; such a sweet letter."

"Well, I don't see anything to laugh at in that. Who the deuce is he? I beg a thousand pardons. I have no business to ask so abruptly. But it seems to me you know so few men—so few——"

"Now, Mr. Tremaine, pray remember that I lived

for more than nineteen years before you ever saw me, and then when we *did* meet, you were not the old friend you pretended to be."

"Now, Miss Carew," he interrupted, "I cannot let that pass, when you *know* how cruelly you imposed upon me. Yes, I grant that in such a long life you may have had vast experiences, but, somehow, I don't think you have. Do tell me the real source of your joy. You don't know how the suggestion even of certain possibilities torture me," he added in a low tone.

"Do you remember," began Sybil, more seriously, "you wanted to know what I was busy about? Now I shall tell you, but it is a profound secret."

"Wild horses could not tear it from me," said Tremaine, who was unable to take his eyes from her animated face.

"Again I ask you not to laugh. I have written a story," continued Sybil, colouring more vividly than Tremaine had ever seen her blush before; "quite a simple one, all about little children, any one might write such a story. I sent it to a children's magazine, and the dear, kind editor says he will give me twenty-five pounds for it. Just think of that!"

"What!" cried Tremaine. "Did you invent a whole story? The incidents, and the talk, and the wind-up? Why, you are a regular genius. As to the twenty-five pounds, it is not half enough. When will it be out? I shall read it most critically."

"No, no; you must not. You would think it rubbish. I should not have told you, only you always seemed kind and friendly."

"I am *not* friendly," cried Tremaine, suddenly car-

ried away by the charm of her unconscious grace, of her confidence in himself. "I am no friend, because I love you too passionately for any mere friendship. I only live from day to day in the hope of seeing you, and now I dread to hear you speak, lest you should send me from you. The idea of parting with you is insupportable. You deserve some one infinitely better in every sense than I am, Sybil; but I *do* love you!"

He leant towards her and took her hand.

"Do you indeed care so much for me?" she said in a low voice, the colour fading from her cheek, the tears coming to her eyes.

"Care is not the word," he urged, raising her hand to his lips. "You have drawn my deepest soul to you. I haven't the courage even to think of the future unless *you* are to be with me. Tell me, Sybil, can you—will you love me?"

"Ah, yes," she said, the tears hanging on her long eyelashes. "No one ever loved me before like this. How sweet it is to be loved! Yes, I will love you, and be true to you."

"But don't you love me already?" asked Tremaine, with a vague feeling of discontent.

"I am not sure," said Sybil. "You see I did not know; I did not think you loved me so much. It is indeed good of you, for I am very lonely," and to his delight she gently pressed the hand he held.

"Good of me," he exclaimed; "as if I had any choice. I was yours utterly, almost from the first hour we met. And, my darling, will you promise to be my wife?"

"I think life with you would be very happy," she

said solemnly, "and I hope I should make *you* happy; I would try."

"What have I done to deserve such a possibility of heaven?" whispered Tremaine, gently passing his arm round her and drawing her to him.

Sybil did not resist, she looked very white and serious.

"But you ought to know that, in spite of my having a rich grandmother, I have no money—not a penny of my own—and Mrs. Rashleigh will never give me any."

"And I have no right to find fault with such a state of things, for I have uncommonly little of my own," said Tremaine smiling, and longing for a kiss, for which he somehow hesitated to ask.

Sybil smiled. "What a nuisance money is," she said, "or rather the want of it. If I have no money, and you have none, we must wait till we make some. I think poverty is worse for men than women."

"No, my sweet; it is ten times worse for you than for us. But I have a plan in my mind, of which I have been thinking ever since I found I could not live without you. I am going to London to consult a very good brother of mine (*not* the one you knew, I need hardly say). Will you wait for my explanation till I come back?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then let the future take care of itself for the moment. Tell me again that you love me, or will love me; and, Sybil, if you care a straw for me, give me one kiss."

Sybil hesitated.

"Did you ever know a declaration scene in any

novel end *without* a kiss?" urged Tremaine smiling, and drawing her very close indeed.

She smiled too, turning her cheek to him frankly enough. But he managed to press his lips to the sweet tremulous mouth, releasing her directly she endeavoured to disengage herself from his embrace.

Then ensued a long rambling talk of their first meeting, of their curious encounter in Mrs. Rashleigh's drawing-room, and many lover-like topics, concerning which Tremaine did most of the talking. At last, warned by the sun, which now peeped in at them through the archway facing their seat, Sybil said softly: "I think I must send you away. Miss Parry would be distressed to find you here; and, Mr. Tremaine, I should like to tell her——"

"Yes, certainly; tell any one and every one you choose," he cried; "only, for heaven's sake call me Dick——every one calls me Dick."

"But Dick does not seem half as familiar as Mr. Tremaine. I have always thought of you as Mr. Tremaine."

"Did you ever think of me, Sybil?"

"Oh, yes! often."

"Now, my darling, I must see you to-morrow, and alone. Will you meet me in your favourite place by the river?"

And Sybil assented.

When the hour was fixed, Sybil again urged his departure.

"You don't seem to understand how horrible it is to leave you, but I will obey if you will say, 'Dick, I love you,' and give me another kiss."

These conditions fulfilled, Tremaine departed, feeling as if he trod on air. "My sweetest love," he murmured to himself, as he made his way towards the woods for a lonely ramble and the enjoyment of his own thoughts, "you do not know how to kiss, but I will teach you; she scarcely loves me yet, but she will."

CHAPTER XI.

"GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART."

MISS PARRY returned at the time she had fixed, but very hot and tired; she had tried to do too much and had a rush to catch her train. She was very thankful to find Dumbledon and the pony carriage waiting for her at the station. Dumbledon was graciously pleased to allow Sybil and Miss Parry the use of that equipage occasionally, much to the joy of the Price children, who profited thereby.

Tea was ready when she arrived, and during that repast she was much occupied in describing her doings during the day's severe shopping, the bargains she had bought, and how she was tempted by some lovely pocket-handkerchiefs and ribbons which, though she did not absolutely want them, it would have been a sin to lose. Then, when tea was cleared away, the little parcels were opened, their contents admired and commented on. When this entrancing occupation was exhausted, and various articles folded ready to be taken upstairs, a lull ensued, during which Miss Parry sud-

denly remembered that, although Sybil had listened attentively, she had hardly spoken; then she saw that her favourite was very pale and grave, and the good spinster's heart began to feel uneasy. Had anything gone wrong? Had any evil happened to the dear child during her absence? Certainly she did not look like herself. But Sybil was not to be lightly cross-examined.

"Would you mind shutting the window, dear; the evening is growing damp. And please bring me my knitting as you are walking about."

Sybil obeyed, and kissed her friend's brow as she handed her the kitting. This increased Araminta's anxiety, for Sybil's caresses were few and far between.

"Well, dear, what have you been doing all day?" began her friend, with what she thought profound subtlety. "Did you feel very lonely?"

"No," returned Sybil very softly.

"And had you any visitors?"

"Only one."

"Who might that be—Miss Price?" continued the artful Araminta.

"No, Minty," smiling; "Mr. Tremaine."

"Indeed! Well, I suppose he did not come in as I was away."

"Oh! yes, he did, and he stayed a long time."

There was a pause. Miss Parry felt that something tremendous was coming.

"Minty," resumed Sybil, drawing her chair close to her friend's, "we had a long, long talk, and he asked me to marry him."

"My dear, you take my breath away," cried Araminta, the colour rising in her usually pale cheeks, with

joy, at such a prospect of home and happiness for the young orphan. "And what did you say?"

"Oh! I said 'yes' with all my heart, Minty."

"But, dearest Sybil, are you quite sure you love and trust and respect him as you ought? It is a most solemn undertaking, and you must reflect——but oh, dear! I *am* pleased! He seems such a nice, well-tempered young man. I *am* thankful everything has come right!"

"I think I am very fond of him. I know I should have felt dreadfully sorry to part with him. I always feel brighter and happier when he is with me. And, Minty—there, put away your knitting and give me your hand. Yes, Minty, I am so grateful to him! He has seen beautiful, accomplished, well-dressed girls all his life, and yet he prefers *me* to every one. Ah, he *does* love me! The tone of his voice told me that, even more than his words, though *they* made my heart glow." She was silent and in deep thought for a minute or two.

"I cannot say how pleased I am," resumed Miss Parry. "I suppose, being in such a regiment, he is pretty well off? Do you think the marriage will take place soon?"

"No—I am sure it will not. Nor is he at all well off. Mr. Tremaine seems to have spent all his money, and people cannot marry without some—so we must wait."

"That is unfortunate," remarked Miss Parry, her countenance falling.

"Oh, he has some plan in his head—I don't know what—and he is going to London to see about it. When he comes back, he will tell me."

Miss Parry did not reply. She had been gazing on a splendid mental vision of an immediate marriage, heaps of congratulations, a desperate hurry-scurry to get something of a trousseau ready, and then elevation, emancipation and glorification for her beloved Sybil for evermore.

"I wish Mr. Tremaine were better off," she said slowly.

"It is only a question of waiting," said Sybil calmly.

"At all events, Sybil, Mr. Tremaine ought to ask your grandmamma's consent. That is the proper course."

"No, Minty, it would be a farce. Her consent is nothing to me. I do not wish her to know anything until I am my own mistress, and I dare say I shall be quite of age before—before we can be married. She would annoy me in various ways, I am sure."

"Well, I do not think so. I think the prospect of your being provided for respectably would be so satisfactory that——"

"No matter, Minty," very firmly. "I do not wish her to know anything. Mr. Tremaine may change—who can tell? I may change—all sorts of things may change, and I will *not* give her the chance of putting her foot more heavily on my neck than she has already. No; I wish the engagement to be kept a profound secret."

"Very well, Sybil; I will be religiously silent, but it would be wiser to speak out."

"I have promised to meet Mr. Tremaine to-morrow by the river—and by myself. I suppose I may?"

"Why yes, but take care, my love, not to make

yourself in any way conspicuous. The worst of a long engagement is the talk it gives rise to."

"I daresay it is. Still, Minty, I would rather not *marry* Mr. Tremaine all at once. Yet it is rather stupid of me to feel in this way. Think of the joy of leaving my grandmother's house for ever! And what a pleasant, kind companion Mr. Tremaine would be! (His name is Dick—not a pretty name, is it? I am not accustomed to it.) And *how* good it is of him to love me so much! Oh, if we ever marry, I *will* be nice and well-tempered. You know I am rather hasty."

"Indeed, Sybil, *any* man might choose you. Do not show you have too *poor* an opinion of yourself."

"I only feel conceited when people try to trample on me; *then* I feel infinitely superior."

"Has Mr. Tremaine a father, Sybil?"

"No, only a brother and a sister, I think; but I don't know about his relations yet."

They talked till late, with many a thoughtful pause; and when they parted for the night, it was with a thankful heart that Miss Parry lay down to rest. It would be better certainly if the marriage could take place at once, and a long engagement was full of hidden perils; but there was a bright look-out for dear Sybil, and if ever there was a young man who would be faithful and honourable, Tremaine was that man.

And Sybil, in her prayers, thanked God for sending her a true friend, a life-long companion. In her heart she never for a moment doubted his constancy. It was all very well to talk to Minty with an air of wisdom about the possibility of change; she did not really believe that Tremaine could change.

The next morning brought a book to Miss Parry and a note to Sybil from Tremaine.

For the note there was no need whatever. Its ostensible object was no remind her of her promise to meet him, and to relieve his own heart by pouring out some of its warmth and tenderness. Sybil blushed and laughed as she read it, and said to her confidant that she had no idea Mr. Tremaine could write so poetically.

The time seemed at once long yet short, until she started to meet Tremaine, having asked Miss Parry, somewhat to that lady's surprise, to meet her at the keeper's lodge to walk back from there.

In the long talk which made the summer afternoon seem but one hour to the lovers, Tremaine could not resist imparting the outlines of his grand scheme to Sybil. "You see," he said with an earnestness very different from his usual manner, "my brother is the head of a big China house. Their chief establishment is at Hong Kong. It was my father's business, but he has made it a much greater concern. I was a child when we lost him, and John, my brother, has been a sort of second father to me. I wouldn't go into the shop; I preferred soldiering, and as I had some money of my own I had my own way. John always wanted me to go into the concern, even since I have been in the army; for he has only two daughters, nearly grown up, and there is no one to succeed him. He is years older than I am. Now, it strikes me, if I told him I wanted to leave the army to marry and "range" myself, as the French say, he would at any rate give me a berth at home or abroad, though I am afraid I should want a good deal of teaching before I could be of much use."

"But you would not like to leave the army?" said Sybil.

"I would rather stay in it, certainly. But I have an object to gain, my darling, that outweighs the army and everything else on earth!" said Tremaine, taking her hand and kissing it. "There is no time to be lost. The colonel will give me a week's leave to run up to town. I shall just catch John and Mrs. Tremaine before they go to Switzerland, and talk it all over with him. I rather think he will fall into my views, and his wife will back me up. She is a good fellow too, and they are a devoted couple, though she had more money than good looks. But let me remark that the Tremaines are exceedingly good husbands, Sybil. How heavenly it is to be able to call you Sybil! to think that we are no longer strangers!"

"But we really know very little of each other," said Sybil, with a far-away look.

"Never mind," exclaimed Tremaine; "just think of all the delightful years that lie before us to complete our acquaintance!" and he gazed lovingly into her eyes. "I shall send in my papers, sell my horses (I have a couple that ought to fetch a good price), and then—for 'strict attention to business,' a profound study of 'book-keeping by double and single entry,' and general devotion to Mammon worship! But I am afraid, my darling, you'll be forty at least before I can give you a diamond necklace."

"Fortunately, diamonds are not necessities," said Sybil, laughing.

"No; all that's really necessary is a lot of love and a little money."

"Tell me, Dick" (she brought out the name with a little effort), "won't your brother be angry with you for wishing to marry a penniless girl like myself?"

"He will shake his head a little, I daresay, but he is a good fellow; and, you see, as he has no son, he would like me to be able to carry on the business when he is an old fogey. Then he has a high opinion of matrimony; he was always tremendously moral."

"He must be very nice and good," said Sybil thoughtfully. "I do hope he will not say anything unkind, anything to hurt your feelings; it is easily done. When shall you go to town?"

"The day after to-morrow. The worst of it is I shall lose the last days of your freedom, my darling. Mrs. Rashleigh returns next week; she is, I suspect, an old fiend?"

"Yes, I think she is. I suppose she cannot help it."

"But, Sybil, I wish you would let me speak to her, ask her consent, and——"

"No, dear Dick, I would much rather you did *not*, at least at present. I feel sure she would use her knowledge to worry *me*."

"You know best; yet I flatter myself I am rather a favourite with the old lady—she might take a favourable view of my case."

"Well, you *are* conceited!" cried Sybil, looking up with a merry glance, "if you flatter yourself you could do anything with my grandmother, unless you could say, 'Mrs. Rashleigh, I wish to marry Sybil, and am ready to take her off your hands next week or next month!' Then she might say 'Thank you.'"

"I wish to God I could!" said Tremaine in a low earnest voice, drawing her close to him.

"Indeed, so do I," returned Sybil, with the sweet frankness that always charmed him. "It is not too blissful to feel oneself a burden—a detested burden!"

"But, besides your natural wish to escape you *do* love me, Sybil?"

"Do you think I could make up my mind to live all my life with any one I did *not* love?" said Sybil, raising her eyes to his. "And you are so good and kind, I am sure I shall love you better the more I know you." The tears stood in her eyes as she spoke.

"You are an angel to care for me!" cried Tremaine enraptured.

"If we have each such a high opinion of the other we *ought* to get on together," returned Sybil smiling, and disengaging herself gently from his encircling arm.

"My darling, I wish you were just the least bit more romantic!"

"I don't think I am unromantic; but I have been so worried with commonplace troubles and mean annoyances that I am forced to be commonsensical in spite of nature. It must be very late, Dick, and I fear Miss Parry will have been waiting at Mrs. Evans', so——"

"Why did you let her come?" exclaimed Tremaine impatiently. "I have so little time to be with you, you might have given me *all* this afternoon!"

"Do not be cross, Dick! It is so dull for her, and she is so fond of me and pleased about you, that I thought it would gratify her. You must be very nice to her, for *my* sake."

"Ah, Sybil, you know you have a spell to conjure with!"

"If you only knew *how* good Minty has been to me—how she has kept my heart alive!"

"That is quite enough for me."

He rose reluctantly, and they walked leisurely towards the keeper's lodge. There the patient "Minty" awaited them. Nothing could be more charming or flattering than Tremaine's manner to her—his frankly-expressed gratitude for her countenance of his suit, his warm thanks for her friendship and kindness to Sybil. Rarely had Miss Parry spent such happy moments as during their homeward walk; indeed, so carried away was she by the unwonted excitement that she dared to invite him to share their evening repast—a feast of cold beef and salad, cakes and tea—which seemed nectar and ambrosia to the young lover, and the propitious day was wound up by a delightful "good-bye" by moonlight in the ruined Priory.

* * * *

When Tremaine had gone to London, taking with him a good deal of sunshine, Miss Parry was somewhat surprised at Sybil's remarkable silence and gravity.

"Are you vexing yourself about anything, dear?" she asked one evening, as the dusk of approaching night was deepening.

"No, Minty, not vexing myself, but feeling anxious what to do. If Dick Tremaine stays in London he must come and see me sometimes. That will oblige me to tell Mrs. Rashleigh, for I cannot degrade myself and him by stolen meetings and concealment. Then I am nervously eager to know what the brother will say or

do. I pray heaven he may be nice and kind to Dick. I don't want to be the means of bringing anything unpleasant on him. I should like to make his real life as sunny as he is himself. You know he has a far better temper, a far sweeter nature, than I have. Isn't it strange that he should have taken such a fancy to me, and on so slight an acquaintance?"

"No, Sybil, I don't think it strange at all; prosaic as life has grown, there are still plenty of instances of love at first sight."

"A sort of love I do not understand," returned Sybil.

Her anxiety was not prolonged. Tremaine had written each day, but he did not touch on the great subject till he could give a full report of the whole matter, with the final decision.

"My brother," he wrote, "has proved all I expected. Of course he considers our matrimonial project foolish, but as there is no immediate intention of carrying it out, does not trouble himself much about it. Then he does not know *you*, sweetheart. He is pleased that I have made up my mind to quit what he irreverently calls 'a beggarly profession.' Of course he gave me a wiggling for my carelessness and extravagance—naturally. Then he made this proposition, which I have accepted, and I earnestly hope you will approve of what I have done. I am to go out to his house at Hong Kong for a year without salary, but to live at free quarters and learn the business; then I am to be a *paid* attaché. Finally, if I prove fairly capable, when the present manager returns, to take a similar place in the London house, there will be a move up. I shall be second in com-

mand, with a fair income and perhaps some per-centage on profits. It is a good offer, and may lead to excellent results. There is but one drawback, and that is a big one—the awful necessity of separation from you for two long weary years! If I could only express what this means to me," &c., &c.

We will cease to quote at this passage, following Sybil's example, who, having read the foregoing aloud, folded up the letter and returned it to its envelope.

"Well, I think that is very satisfactory," said Miss Parry, who had listened with heart as well as ears. "Of course it is a long engagement, and I don't see how he is to manage to come back for you."

"Time enough to think about that; but it is very, very long. Oh, I do hope Mr. Tremaine—I mean Dick—will not be unhappy or uncomfortable; I should like to make everything bright for him! He says further on that he has sent in his papers—I suppose that means his resignation—and he wants to start as soon as possible, that he may get through his penance. He hopes to be here on Saturday night. Is it not horrid that Mrs. Rashleigh will arrive the same day?"

"It is, indeed."

Luck, however, was for once on the side of youth and love. Next day brought a letter from Lady Elizabeth Rashleigh to Miss Parry, announcing that "dear Mrs. Rashleigh" had taken cold, which affected her chest, and that it would be imprudent for her to travel for another week.

"I *am* glad!" said Sybil impulsively. "Not that I want her to suffer, disagreeable as she is, but just to stay away and be coddled for ten days more."

"I am sure I am sorry, and yet——" began Miss Parry.

"Now, Minty, don't be hypocritical; you know you are glad too; and we do not want her to be more than slightly indisposed."

This was a precious breathing space. Tremaine spent some happy hours of confidential talk, and planned many happy years to come, with his lady-love, while he managed to wind up his affairs satisfactorily. His brother officers were sincerely sorry to part with him—he was a prime favourite. Some thought him wise and some thought him foolish in quitting military for civil life; none save MacIntyre knew the motive power which actuated him.

"If you *want* to marry," was that sage's comment, "why, you might go further and fare worse—a sweeter lassie than Miss Carew I have rarely seen—but, my laddie, old bachelorhood is not to be sneezed at, *I* can tell you. The cares of life are a mere feather-weight when you haven't the tonnage of a family to drag you down."

"Never mind, MacIntyre, I am ready to brave that and more."

To their comrades MacIntyre said he thought the boy had done well for himself, only he feared the climate would try him.

"For all his good looks and spirit he has a weak point or two. He nearly slipped through old Sawbone's fingers that time he had bronchitis, while he was with the depôt, before he came out to Umballa; those winters in India set him up. I am deuced sorry to lose him."

Some busy weeks ensued, during which Tremaine was kept in London. Then came a hurried letter, begging for information as to Mrs. Rashleigh's movements. "I sail on the 28th and I must see you once more alone," he wrote. "I bid good-bye to the dear old regiment the evening before I visit the Priory—but what is that to the parting with *you*? Give me a notion what day I ought to fix."

Mrs. Rashleigh had not many engagements just then, for most of the magnates were away. She had, however, promised to be present at a very exclusive garden party given by the Marchioness of Bobingham, which was on no account to be missed; this was fixed for the 25th. On the previous day Tremaine arrived by the earliest train, and made formal farewell visits to his acquaintances, among them to Mrs. Rashleigh, when Sybil took care not to be visible. Then there was a dinner at mess in his honour, at which all the officers from Freightsborough who could absent themselves appeared. The next day, so soon as Mrs. Rashleigh's carriage had driven off, he rang the big bell at the front gate.

Miss Parry was alone when he was shown into the little morning-room, where he had spent some happy hours.

"I thought I would say good-bye, and wish you God-speed," said the kindly spinster, with tearful eyes. "Then I shall let Sybil know you are here."

"Thank you a thousand times," returned Tremaine. "I, too, wanted to speak to you. Will you persuade Sybil to have her photograph taken? It will be such a comfort to have it when I am far away. MacIntyre,

who is my best friend, has promised to manage the matter. He says there's a very good man in Foregate Street."

"Couldn't Major MacIntyre do the photograph himself?"

"No, no! He is all very well for still life, but his portraits are ghastly! Now you *won't* forget. You will write to MacIntyre. I'll speak to Sybil myself, too. And Miss Parry, you are a true good friend. Take care of her. Stick by her, for God's sake. If there is any trouble or difficulty with that screw of a grandmother, *you* must let me know. Though I am far away I could manage to help. Sybil won't tell me. You'll promise to comfort her and take care of her?"

"I will, indeed. She is very dear to me. No one knows how sweet and kind she is as I do, though she is a little fiery sometimes."

"Then good-bye, my dear Miss Parry. My warmest thanks for all your kindness. I can never forget it. Now go—like a dear good soul—send Sybil to me—the time is so cruelly short."

"Good-bye, God bless you!" exclaimed Araminta with her handkerchief to her eyes, as she shook hands and left the room.

Tremaine had not accomplished two turns when Sybil stood before him.

"How white you look, darling," he exclaimed, when they had exchanged greetings and sat down side by side on the little hard shabby sofa—and he gazed at her with loving, longing eyes.

"I dare say I am. I did not sleep. I do not often lie awake. I will rub my cheeks," suiting the action to

the word, "to bring back the roses. I don't want you to remember me as a pale ugly thing."

"Ah, Sybil! the pale cheeks are lovelier to me than all the roses in Cashmere. I want you to promise me something!" He went on to persuade her to be photographed, and in the dress she wore the day he first called at the Priory.

Sybil was not unyielding, but a little uneasy at the idea of Major MacIntyre sharing their secret.

"But MacIntyre is as close as wax," exclaimed Tremaine. "Why, the keenest cross-examining counsel could not get anything out of him."

How quickly the precious moments flew! Their hearts were full—and yet the sense that time was flying made it almost impossible to remember all they had to say to each other. Some little attempt on Tremaine's part to paint the future in glowing colours just to cheer himself as well as his companion, a few memories of their first dawning attachment, earnest entreaties on his part for regular letters, and it was nearly time to part.

"Send my letters to my brother's care," said Tremaine. "You have his business address there, in the envelope with my photograph—and Sybil, my own, my darling, wear this ring for my sake." He drew a small case from his pocket, opened it and placed on the third finger of her left hand a turquoise and diamond ring. "I chose it because they say turquoises are lucky."

"It is very beautiful, and if it were not, I should prize it all the same for your sake," said Sybil in tremulous tones.

"Thank you for those sweet words. Oh! Sybil— isn't that clock fast?"

"I am afraid it is not," she faltered.

"Then it must be good-bye. I dare not stay. Oh! Sybil, put your arms round my neck and kiss me of your own free will this once."

And Sybil, infinitely touched by the love and sorrow in his usually laughing eyes, put her arms round him and kissed him tenderly with tears, letting him hold her long and passionately in a close embrace.

"How shall I live away from you?" he murmured.

"Think of the joy of meeting again, Dick! We are young; the time will pass away soon. It will make me so miserable if I think *you* are."

"Another kiss! God be with you and guard you!" and he tore himself away—shaken to his heart's core, yet not without comfort, for Sybil's frank exquisite tenderness impressed him for the first time with the complete conviction that she loved him almost as devoutly as he loved her.

The clang of the great iron gate closing after him warned the faithful Araminta that Tremaine was gone—and she flew down to comfort her dear young friend.

Sybil was sitting at her writing table, her elbows resting on it, her face hidden in her hands.

"My poor dear! It is a great trial; but it is only for a time."

"Yes, I know; but his eyes haunt me. They were full of soul-ache. I could bear it ever so much better if *he* did not look so heartbroken."

And the two women dissolved in tears in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XII.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

A WILD west wind was driving occasional showers of heavy rain against the tall windows of the sitting-room shared by Sybil and her good friend one dreary October afternoon, more than a year after the tender farewell with which the last chapter closed.

The curtains and furniture were a trifle more faded, the one easy chair a little more rubbed, the patches on the arms a little larger than when we saw it last, and the writing-table more piled with papers and books. Sybil sat alone on a low stool beside a small fire on which she was carefully depositing what available cinders she could find on the hearth. Beside her on the carpet lay a dark woollen dress she had been mending; she now sat, tongs in hand, gazing into the grate as if in deep thought. Her expression was more serious and softer than it used to be, though it had a tinge of sadness always.

The days after Tremaine's departure had been indeed dull and dreary. She missed him even more than she expected, yet the weeks went by rapidly, and a new source of pleasure was opened up to her in his letters, and in her own to him. The same strain of boyish frankness and brightness which characterized his man-

ner, spoke in his writing, nor were his unstudied descriptions unamusing.

She often read aloud passages of his letters to "Minty," who was enchanted by the confidence thus placed in her. Possibly Lynchester would not have been flattered had the pen and ink pictures of life within its ancient walls, as it appeared to her, been extracted from Sybil's replies to her lover and published in that high-class Conservative paper, *The Courier*.

But her life was not all dulness by any means. She had sweet hope always with her and some fulfilment also.

Her child's story was evidently successful, for the editor of that popular juvenile periodical, *Jack and Jill*, asked for further contributions, and a well-known firm of publishers wrote to know her terms for a one-volume tale, suited to girls between twelve and fifteen, so time did not hang heavy on her hands.

In addition to this pleasant and profitable employment, her friend Mrs. Winter was, during the previous months, threatened with cataract—threatening which unfortunately proved prophetic. Sybil therefore passed many hours reading aloud to her, endearing herself by this and many other services to the kindly plucky little woman.

During this time a decided friendship sprang up between her and young Playford, whose fear of his aunt's favourite seemed to have melted away. Indeed, he frequently escorted her home in the dusk of the winter afternoons when he happened to be staying at his uncle's house. Sometimes on these occasions he was graciously received by Mrs. Rashleigh herself, who

began to hope she might soon be relieved of the discomfort of her granddaughter's presence. It came upon her, therefore, like a thunderbolt, the sudden announcement that Miss Price was engaged to Playford. The gossips said that somehow Mrs. Winter had been won over to a favourable view of the young people's project, and had then persuaded her husband to give his consent also.

Mrs. Rashleigh on receipt of this news had an interview with Sybil, which did not exactly incline either to peace.

Very bitter words were spoken by the elder woman, and though still keeping a brave front, Sybil retired from the conflict a good deal shaken.

"It is an awful thing to be hated, Minty!" she said to her confidante. "I would give the world to go away out of my grandmother's sight. But I *must* stay. Dick is so anxious I should not leave this house till he comes for me, and the weeks are slipping away. In six months I shall attain my majority; then I shall do what I like, and perhaps Dick will be able to come home. Ah! Minty, 'Time and the hour run through the darkest day,'" and Araminta soothed her to the best of her ability.

All this time we have left Sybil staring at the fire.

The entrance of Miss Parry roused her.

"Oh! Minty! do ask for some more coals," cried Sybil, putting down the tongs. "And when are you coming to sit down in peace? You have been running about the whole morning."

"Oh! I don't expect to sit down till Captain Rash-

leigh comes. We have had such short notice. Why, he may be here to-morrow. Did you see my key-basket, dear? I thought I left it on the chimney-piece?"

"No, it is not there," said Sybil, picking up her dress and turning it over to find the needle. "I think you took it downstairs with you. Haven't you finished yet. If everything is to be upset for this tiresome man, we have a pleasant look-out."

"Well, Sybil, it is but natural that Mrs. Rashleigh should like to welcome her son; and, you must remember, it is his own house. Now Sybil, I have been longing to offer you a little advice, if you don't mind. Do not be uncivil to Captain Rashleigh. He might be a very good friend to you."

"I don't fancy he would be much of a friend to any one," said Sybil, thoughtfully. "And why should I want his friendship? In a few months he will be gone out of my life, if he ever had any part in it, and we may never met again."

"No one can tell what may happen," returned Miss Parry, as she hunted wildly for the key-basket.

"If you pleas'm," said the housemaid, putting in her head, "Mrs. Rashleigh says you are to be sure to put a pair of the best frilled sheets in Captain Rashleigh's room, and cook told me to let you know the butcher is afraid he cannot let us have any sweetbreads to-morrow, they are all bespoke."

"Dear me, how *very* provoking! Mrs. Rashleigh quite set her mind on sweetbreads; now we will be obliged to make a curry instead."

"And if you think a man fresh from India will like

an English curry, I fear you are very much mistaken," said Sybil mischievously.

"You are really unkind, Sybil. I will come to cook directly." Then, in a tone of joy, "Oh, here it is! How in the world could it have got under the newspapers!" And Miss Parry seized the key-basket. "I wish, Sybil, you had not been so obstinate; do what you will, you cannot help that dress looking shabby. Why, you have had it three winters. You might have had a new one if you had let me ask. Mrs. Rashleigh, I can see, likes you to look nice."

"And I like much more to spare her pocket. After our last battle I feel as if clothes bought with her money would scorch me; and as I will not take a shilling from my precious hoard, why, I must make my present rags last me a few months longer."

"Still, dear, I wish you *had* a new dress. First impressions are most important, and now that Captain Rash——"

"Minty!" broke in Sybil, starting up and grasping her hair with both hands, "If you repeat that name again I shall go upstairs and trample on your best bonnet. Go—go to cook, and see if you can create new sweetbreads to satisfy the dainty taste of our coming tyrant; but if you can't, fall back on simple mutton-chops rather than risk a curry. I am growing cross. I shall wrap up and run to the stable to refresh myself with a glimpse of Oscar and the pony."

Miss Parry left the room to struggle as best she could with the difficulties upstairs and down, which were increasing each hour since a letter from Rashleigh, about a fortnight before, informed his step-mother of his

sudden decision to take leave of absence and anticipate the return of his battery by about six months.

No one could exactly make out if this was pleasant or unpleasant news to Mrs. Rashleigh. At home, she looked exceedingly grim, and issued her orders with more than her usual imperious severity. Abroad, she told her friends and the public that she was feeling quite young again, so delightful was the prospect of seeing her dear boy after six years' absence.

The small household at the Priory had their work cut out from the time the announcement reached their mistress; even Sybil, though quite untouched by the excitement which moved the rest, took her share in the work, wishing to lighten the labours of her chum.

The day following that on which this portion of our story opens was clear and cloudless. The walls, the woods, the river, all looked their best, and a fine sunset promised a spell of good weather. The mellow light of autumn was peculiarly becoming to the stately beauty of the old town, and Sybil, who had gone forth to refresh herself by wandering round the walls, wondered if Brian Rashleigh felt any affection for the home of his boyhood. "If I had been happy here, I should have loved the place dearly," she thought. "How charmed Dick always was with its old-world picturesqueness. I wonder if Brian is as rugged and angry-looking as ever. We shall not see much of him, I suppose. Mrs. Rashleigh was very emphatic in her directions that the table should be laid for two only. He will think I am a miserable member of some disgraced branch of the family."

The usual train by which Lynchestrians travelled

homeward from London reached the old city at seven, and a little before that hour Mrs. Rashleigh had established herself and her knitting beside a fine fire in the library, which gleamed on the tiled hearth, and lit up the dark oak furniture in a very pleasant and comforting fashion. The only other light was a reading lamp on an occasional table near which she sat.

Mrs. Rashleigh had not been seated many minutes when Sybil entered, carrying a basket of hothouse flowers. She hesitated for a second on perceiving her grandmother. "I did not know you were here," she said. "I have just been arranging the table for Miss Parry, and as these were over, I thought you might like them here."

"Very well, put them on the table. By the way," continued Mrs. Rashleigh, "I have forgotten to mention that as Captain Rashleigh will probably use this library as a sitting and smoking-room, I beg there may be no strumming on the piano while he is here. The room you and Miss Parry use is, you must remember, so unfortunately near."

"Perhaps it would conduce more to his comfort if Miss Parry and I moved downstairs to the housekeeper's room, or sat in the kitchen!" said Sybil gently, and with perfect gravity.

Mrs. Rashleigh raised her stern black eyes and looked sharply at the speaker, but Sybil kept a calm and questioning expression.

While the "eye-duel" lasted the gate-bell sounded. "There!" exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh, "that is enough—go," and Sybil managed to escape to her own room before the expected guest crossed the threshold.

Mrs. Rashleigh stirred the fire to a brighter glow. The next moment the door was opened, and Stone announced "Captain Rashleigh," and enter a tall, large-framed man with a rather gaunt face, a square chin, large sandy moustaches, close-cropped hair, and steely blue eyes, to the full as stern as Mrs. Rashleigh's black ones.

His stepmother advanced to meet him with her best smile, and a slightly anxious expression.

"My dear boy! I am indeed rejoiced to welcome you back!" she said, holding out both hands.

Rashleigh only took one. "Thank you!" he said, and bending down he lightly kissed her brow. "Very glad to see you, and to see you looking so well—first rate." He let her hand go. "We had rather a cold journey. I travelled down with young Wyndham, whom I met at the station." As he spoke he threw off his ulster and showed, in his close fitting morning coat, that his breadth was due much more to bone than flesh. "We were some minutes behind time, so I must not detain you by dressing for dinner; I am rather hungry myself."

"No, my dear Brian, it is not at all necessary, after your journey. Had you a good voyage?"

"Capital! Rather rough in the Mediterranean, but quick, which is the main point. Gad! how curious it seems to be in the old place again, and find everything just as it was. Why, they have the same rascally hole of a station still; I thought they were going to build a new one!"

"Things move slowly here, but"—ringing—"you will like to go to your room. I have arranged your poor

father's bed and dressing-room for you. I have established myself in the front suite."

"Oh, indeed, much obliged; I like to look on the green fields. By the way, I hope the stables are in good condition. I shall want a couple of horses here through the winter."

"My dear Brian, you will find your house and its belongings in excellent order, I flatter myself."

"No doubt," he returned, with a smile—rather a pleasant smile—and taking up his ulster he followed the severe Stone, who was carrying his travelling bag upstairs.

Mrs. Rashleigh returned to her knitting, and her face grew grave. "It is impossible to know what Brian thinks or feels," she thought, "he has always been so silent and undemonstrative. I hope he will be satisfied with everything. It would be well if he would marry Aline soon, then Lady Elizabeth would always want them at Dene Court when he had leave of absence. When old John Rashleigh dies (he can't live long—his cough has been most trying all last winter and spring), why, Brian will not want this house. I should not mind sharing it and expenses with Lady Elizabeth; she talks noisily, but *I* could manage her. As to Sybil, as soon as she is of age she may go. Of course my responsibility will be at an end then, and I'll get rid of her somehow. Brian must understand *how* unmanageable she is. It was his whim which brought all the cost and annoyance of her residence here upon me."

Here dinner was announced, and Captain Rashleigh re-entered at the same moment. He offered his arm to his stepmother, observing, as they passed through the

hall, "The old house looks first-rate, by George! Nothing like England, after all."

Then he devoted himself to his dinner—soup, fish and a saddle of Welsh mutton succeeded each other and were evidently approved. Then came curried chicken. At the first mouthful Brian laid down his knife and fork. "It's enough to burn one's tongue out!" he exclaimed. "You have plenty of indigenous good things. I would not experiment on foreign dishes if I were you."

Mrs. Rashleigh signed to the attendant, and the objectionable curry was replaced by a plump, delicately-roasted grouse, with all the proper accompaniments.

"This is something you can't get anywhere else," said Brian Rashleigh approvingly.

"Yes, the Dene Court grouse are remarkably good," said Mrs. Rashleigh. "Lady Elizabeth has sent some over for your delectation, to say nothing of fruit and flowers, though we are pretty well off for the latter. Poor old Dumbledon really does very well. Of course to me an old *employé* of your dear father's, whether he does well or ill, is a sacred charge. But to return to Dene Court. I cannot tell you how kind and attentive Lady Elizabeth has been to me; and Aline has grown up a charming girl. Just an ideal English country lady, and has been greatly admired in London, I am told."

"Girls change a good deal, I am told," he returned. "Take another glass of claret? You had better. It's a sound wine—some of the old stuff, eh?"

"Yes, dear boy. It has never been touched since you went on foreign service."

"Oh, then, by Jove! you must have another glass."

"On this occasion I cannot refuse. But, apropos of Dene Court, poor John Rashleigh is failing fast. I believe he does not intend to hunt this season."

"He must be far gone," exclaimed Rashleigh, helping himself to olives. "I am awfully sorry to hear it. I'll go out and see them to-morrow."

"Yes. They will be so pleased to see you. Aline rides very nicely. She always rides with her father. She is quite a devoted daughter, and has such a strong sense of duty."

"By the way, what's become of that wild little granddaughter of yours? You haven't mentioned her for some time."

"If I did not," said Mrs. Rashleigh slowly, "it is because I had nothing good to say. I suppose she cannot help it, but she has given me a good deal of trouble. She is self-willed to a degree and rather eccentric. She might go everywhere, being my granddaughter, but she will not make friends with any one. Then she seems to have a curious dislike to myself. She has a sort of crooked pride, which I cannot understand. To-day, for instance, I begged her not to strum on the piano, as it might annoy you—she really cannot play—and she asked demurely if it would conduce to your comfort if she were to sit in the kitchen?"

Rashleigh laughed. "Rather a cross speech," he said.

"The fact is, I believe her father was not thoroughly sane—so——"

"There I imagine you are mistaken," interrupted Rashleigh. "Colonel Brabazon, of the Sixth Hussars,

knew him well—he was in that regiment in his early days—and Brabazon says he was a first-rate fellow, a thorough gentleman, and a handsome man to boot. Pity he didn't pass on his good looks to his daughter. She was a queer little creature when I saw her."

"Well, she has almost worn me out. But with young people one must always hope—they are generally troublesome. I am sure I am glad dear Lady Elizabeth has such comfort in *her* daughter—she is gentle and conscientious and fond of home pleasures, but not at all brilliant."

"Ah, well; so much the better. Your fascinating, brilliant women generally go wrong," said Brian, "at least in India."

"Would you like to smoke, Brian? I do not mind in the least."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure." Rashleigh drew forth his cigar-case and lit up.

The conversation then turned on strictly personal and business matters, and though neither of the speakers was disposed "to pour out his or her heart" to the other, the minutes flew fast, and they still sat by the dining-room fire.

At length Mrs. Rashleigh, glancing at the clock, remarked that it was past her usual time for retiring. "And I daresay you are ready for bed too, Brian," she added.

"Well, yes. At any rate I shall go to my room. Pray do not let me interfere with your regular routine in any way."

"Thank you, my dear son. At my age one is in-

clined to get into a groove. Breakfast is at nine. I take mine in my room, but Miss Parry, my companion and secretary, will make tea for you. If it bores you to have her and Sybil Carew at breakfast, pray mention it to me, and I shall make other arrangements."

Rashleigh laughed. "I am not much of a lady's man, certainly," he said. "But I am not so morose as to object to breakfast with a couple of women—especially if they make good tea. Later on I shall want mine earlier, I dare say."

They exchanged good-nights—Rashleigh repeating his congratulations to his stepmother on her unchanged good looks.

After unpacking—or, rather, throwing out his garments hither and thither—Brian Rashleigh drew a comfortable chair to the fire and sat down to smoke a final cigar before turning in. "She is marvellously well preserved," he thought. "But somehow she seems harder, more incased in some kind of shell than she used to be. I suppose it's because I haven't seen her for a long time. No matter; she was a capital, sensible mother to me, and made my poor sickly father deucedly comfortable. I mustn't forget that. How curiously still the place seems; but I'll enjoy a good season with the old Lynshire hounds again. Rather queer being shut up in the house with three women—two old ones and a child—at least, a school-girl. I suppose she is not 'out' yet, or she would have have been at dinner. She has evidently been a handful to my respected stepmother. Stupid little muff! *I* never found it hard to get on with her. I must go and see the Dene Court people to-morrow. I wonder if my uncle has anything

worth buying in his stables. Poor old chap! how straight he used to ride. What a nuisance it must be to grow old and shaky. How awfully riled I should be if I had only a daughter to succeed me—unless, indeed, I had a nephew like myself. *I am a Rashleigh to the backbone.*”

Then visions of how he would manage the property and keep a fine stud, or perhaps go into Parliament and help the Conservatives to keep back the rising tide of radicalism and democracy and such-like damnable tendencies, when he succeeded his uncle, floated before his eyes till, finding them closing in sleep, he roused himself and went to bed.

Brian Rashleigh was essentially a man's man, though not what is termed “universally popular”—he was too blunt and downright for that. Indeed a certain class of men who were not over-scrupulous as to the means by which they pushed their fortunes, hated him, and spoke of him as that “big brute, Rashleigh;” others who knew him well, or had been in his battery, if not enthusiastic in his praise, liked and respected him; his soldiers feared him, but had great trust in his justice, and every one was ready to join a hunting party got up by Brian Rashleigh, who was a mighty Nimrod and passionately fond of sport.

To women he was quite indifferent. Not that he ever talked or thought any cynical nonsense respecting their wickedness or falseness, their folly or their weakness—on the whole he was inclined to think the majority were good souls and useful, though he was too often the confidant of his younger friends, whose faith in his silence and prudence was unbounded, not to know that a large sprinkling were fascinating devils, quite capable

of ruining the men who were devoted to them. For himself, he didn't understand such idiotic weakness. Still he did not dislike the sort of soft deference with which he was treated by his fair acquaintances—though quite aware it was due more to his possessions and expectations than to his individual merit. Then he never knew what to talk to women about—they seemed rather silly to him. Moreover, if they were horsey and held forth on sporting topics it rather offended his taste. Some day it would be his duty to marry, and marry he would, but he had a good long spell of freedom before him, thank heaven!

The following morning was cool and crisp, but bright, and Captain Rashleigh, in most correct country get-up, descended in excellent humour to the morning meal. Tea at the Priory, early or late, was always served with a huge silver tea-urn, under which a spirit lamp burned. Rising from behind its friendly shelter, Miss Parry, feeling exceedingly nervous, stepped forth to receive the autocrat of all the Rashleighs.

"Miss Parry, I suppose," said that important personage. "Good morning."

"I hope you slept well?" said the amiable spinster.

"Thanks, admirably."

"We will not wait for Miss Carew; she is sometimes a little late. Will you take some dried haddock or cold ham?"

"Thanks; I'll help myself."

A pause—only broken by a timid inquiry, "Do you take milk and sugar?"

"Yes, both." Then Brian said, half to himself, "Capital cup of tea!"

"I am very glad you like it," said Miss Parry, much encouraged. "You have been absent for a long time."

"For more than six years; and Time seems to have stood still here."

"You find Mrs. Rashleigh looking very well?"

"I do, quite first-rate."

Here the door opened gently, and Sybil entered. She wore her much mended blue serge, a line of white frilling at throat and wrists, her sunny chestnut hair twisted into a loose knot on the top of her head, a few locks curling tendril-like about her brow. Her old gown fitted well, and Rashleigh looked at her in great surprise as she moved with grace and a certain decision across the room. He had a keen eye for form, trained as it had been to the beauty of nature in fauna and flora; something in her step, her carriage, and the setting on of her head was indescribably distinguished, and utterly unlike what he could have expected from the little ill-dressed neglected waif he had left six years ago. He rose and, advancing to meet her, held out his hand.

"Why, Sybil," he exclaimed, "I should not have known you if I had met you anywhere else than here! I suppose you hardly remember me?"

"I remember you perfectly," said Sybil, giving him her hand for a second, and looking very steadily into his face without the ghost of a smile, while the tone of her voice did not convey the idea of an agreeable recollection. But it did not seem to convey any especial meaning to Rashleigh, who returned to his seat and pushed the butter towards Sybil, whose place was op-

posite, and continued his breakfast as if it was a matter of great importance. Sybil helped herself to marmalade, and silence reigned for a few minutes.

"When do you get the London papers?" asked Rashleigh. "They used to come in about this time."

"They are a little late to-day," observed Miss Parry. "I will ask if they have come; I know Mrs. Rashleigh ordered the *Times* for your benefit." She rose and rang. "Hasn't the *Times* come yet?" she asked when the servant appeared.

"I don't know 'm; I'll ask Jane. I didn't know as it was to come."

"I am afraid there has been some mistake," said Miss Parry, apologetically.

"Very likely," returned Rashleigh; "and it is rather a nuisance. One of the comforts of home life is to have the *Times* at breakfast."

Having nothing else to occupy his attention he bestowed it on his opposite neighbour, who was silent, he concluded, because his important presence made her feel shy and timid. Who could have imagined that the thin awkward child he dimly remembered would have developed into such an elegant-looking girl?

"I suppose you are what is called 'out,'" he began, intending to show her that she was not beneath his notice.

His voice seemed harsh and overbearing to Sybil, who was bristling all over with antagonism.

"No, I am always 'in.'"

"How's that? Are you averse to society? Far gone in High Church devotion?—or Higher Education?—or what?"

Sybil shook her head.

"It seems only the other day you arrived here. I remember what a curious little specimen I thought you, with your big eyes, your wild hair and outlandish clothes," he laughed, contrasting the past and present.

Sybil lifted her eyes to his as if studying him deliberately.

"And *I* remember the impression you made on *me*. I thought you extremely forbidding," she said calmly and sweetly.

Miss Parry nearly jumped out of her chair with horror.

Rashleigh opened his grave eyes, and an amused look came into his face.

"I suppose I frightened you; I am sure I never intended to do so."

"Frightened me? No, I don't think so!" Another steady look. "You don't at all give me the idea of a man *I* should fear," and she smiled at him, a sweet bright smile showing her pearly-white teeth.

"By Jove!" thought Rashleigh, "I suspect the old lady *does* find her a handful!" He only said drily, "Very glad to hear it."

Here the parlour-maid entered with the newspaper, saying, "Please 'm, the boy says the papers were late this morning."

Rashleigh stretched out his hand for it, and was soon absorbed in the contents.

After hesitating a moment as to what would be the correct thing to do, Miss Parry rose, and began to put away the sugar, preserves, etc. in their places, very gently.

"I see those birds of ill omen, the weather prophets, foretell an early and prolonged frost," said Rashleigh.

"How tiresome!" ejaculated Miss Parry sympathetically.

Looking round for some expression from Sybil, he found she had disappeared.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

FOR a week or two Miss Parry and Sybil saw little or nothing of Captain Rashleigh. He breakfasted at eight, while Miss Parry and Sybil rarely appeared till nine. Then he was not often seen at luncheon, as he was out all day busy seeking for hunters and the paraphernalia of the chase; then he sometimes went to Dene Court to dine and stay the night, besides being solemnly entertained at the Palace, the Deanery, the Chancellor's, and at many of the nearer dignitaries' abodes. To the dinners within the ancient walls, Mrs. Rashleigh went in state. It was a time of great glorification to her; she posed most successfully as mother of the heir of Dene Court. Moreover, he had to run up to London, to see what sort of a mount he could find at Tattersall's, to say nothing of inspecting certain improvements in the stables.

When by any chance he joined the family at lunch, however, Brian always bestowed some attention with condescending civility on Sybil. She was too pleased and interested with her new work to trouble herself

about him. Prompted by her Araminta, she had dared to ask for larger pay than was offered, and to her delight her request was granted. She therefore set to work in high spirits and hope; then Dick's letters were bright and loving, and altogether she thought her luck was turning at last.

Brian Rashleigh had been three weeks at home, and his devoted stepmother was contemplating a series of return dinner-parties. These were not anticipated with much pleasure by the owner of the house; he was growing rather tired of the solemn festivities held in his honour, but the first meet of the Lynshire hounds was to take place the following week, and this prospect upheld him.

These frequent absences were a boon to Sybil. They enabled her to go in and out of the library and choose what books she needed to refer to with perfect freedom (the work she had agreed to undertake was "Episodes in English History, for little readers"). The library had been assigned to Rashleigh, and Mrs. Rashleigh had strictly forbidden any intrusion on his sacred premises. Thinking he was safe away for the whole afternoon, Sybil dared to trespass upon them, and, standing on one of the carefully preserved leather chairs, was taking down a volume of Goldsmith's history from a high shelf, when the door was rather noisily opened, and Rashleigh came in, whip in hand, booted and spurred.

Sybil was infinitely annoyed to be caught in such an undignified position, and intruding into the bargain.

"Hullo!" cried Rashleigh, smiling, "I did not know you were here."

"I have to apologize for intruding," said Sybil, blushing with surprise and annoyance. "I wanted a book, and I thought you were quite gone, or I should not have come," and she jumped lightly down.

"Why should you not?" asked Rashleigh, removing his hat and putting it on the table. "Do you think I am such a dog in the manger as to keep the books I rarely use for myself alone? You evidently have a very indifferent opinion of me."

"I do not know you and cannot form any opinion," said Sybil, seeing he looked for a reply.

"Our acquaintance is not likely to improve at the rate we go," he returned. "However, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you at breakfast for the next few days; the mornings are too dark to make early rising agreeable."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Sybil heartily.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Rashleigh. "That is more than I expected."

"Well, you see," she said, with a frank laugh, "I like nice *fresh* tea, and the remains of *yours* is rather cold, and VERY bitter; *we* have to put up with the dregs of *your* tea-pot."

"By Jove! that's too bad!" cried Rashleigh, quite seriously. "Why don't you order a fresh supply?"

"Order!" exclaimed Sybil. "Pray understand that Miss Parry and myself may be *ordered*, but we never order. We take what we get, and are thankful."

There was a short pause. Rashleigh stood pulling his long moustaches thoughtfully. "It seems a big shame," he said, at last, "but it can be remedied."

"*You* may remedy it; no one else can," said Sybil, laughing.

"What's your book?" asked Rashleigh. Sybil showed it to him.

"Goldsmith's *England!*" he exclaimed. "That is rather a primitive work; I should have thought you had left that kind of literature behind at school."

"I want to revive my memory of the old studies," returned Sybil, carelessly, holding out her hand for the book.

Rashleigh hesitated; looked earnestly at her, and then with an effort burst into speech. "Why don't you make friends with your grandmother? She may be a little overbearing, but you know she is an old woman now, and fond of her own way (I suspect *you* are rather like her in that); then she has done everything for you, and it is very unwise to contradict her. I rather imagine it is in her power to leave you fairly independent at her death; so take my advice, be more accommodating."

"Independent! I hope to be independent long before she has departed this life!" exclaimed Sybil, who had stood in wonder and gathering indignation, her eyes fixed on his, her head held high and haughtily. "You consider Mrs. Rashleigh capable of being a mother to any one?"

"I know she was a very good, judicious mother to *me*, and I was nothing to her; now *you* are her daughter's daughter."

His words touched some minor chord in Sybil's heart; tears started to her resentful eyes, while a little scornful smile curved her mouth.

"You think *that* a point in my favour, do you? I will tell you what is in *your* favour: you have cost her *nothing*, rather for *her*, you have both money and social value, while *I* am a burden, an unwelcome burden, as I have been made to feel! Did I ask to be brought into this world, and be left to charity? Is it my fault or my misfortune? I have begged, repeatedly begged, Mrs. Rashleigh to let me go and, at least, try to earn my own bread. I *could* do it—humbly—for I am not clever nor accomplished, and she refuses. While I am a minor I suppose she could prevent me. In six or seven months I shall be twenty-one; then *nothing* shall keep me here. I rather think your nature is too like your stepmother's to be capable of understanding all she has inflicted on me. Let me hear no more about my debts and duties towards Mrs. Rashleigh; you are no kinsman of mine, and you have no right to lecture me." She turned towards the door.

Rashleigh stood still with astonishment. It was the first time he had ever come into contact with a real live woman who spoke out as she felt, without stopping to choose her words or think of consequences; and what a soft, slender, refined looking creature she was when in repose!

"Pray hear me!" he exclaimed. She paused and half turned. "I dare say I am wanting in tact, but I don't think my lecture, as you term it, deserved so fiery a rebuke. I really meant well, and should like to be friends with you, but as you seem to have a very poor opinion of me I shall not force myself upon you."

Sybil was silent for a moment. "I dare say I am hasty, and possibly unjust," she said. "If you really

care to be friends with *me*, it must be from pure good nature, and indeed," looking at him with the smile which was always very close to her tears, "you do not *look* good-natured. I have nothing to give, and am insignificant enough to every one but myself. If I have been rude I regret it, but believe me there is no use in advising me, or troubling about me. I neither forgive nor forget easily. You will understand things better when you have been longer in the house."

"All right," returned Rashleigh, "I'll take your hint and save my counsel." Sybil bent her head, not ungraciously, and left the room.

Rashleigh stood for a few moments on the hearthrug, whistling—not for want of thought—then, taking his hat, went out to the stables.

It was some little time before Sybil could settle to her writing. She had been much upset by her passage of arms with Rashleigh—not that she regretted anything she had said respecting her grandmother—but she was greatly surprised to find that the objectionable Brian Rashleigh had taken thought of her and her relations to his stepmother. She certainly was too hasty. If, as she had no reason to doubt, he had meant kindly, it was ungracious to resent it; but indignation with Mrs. Rashleigh, and the old sense of dislike to Brian, had carried her away. As to the latter, years and experience might have improved him. In future she would at least be civil, but she would permit no preaching. This little fracas would be valuable material for next week's letter to Dick. Dear Dick! how kind and considerate *he* would be to any woman in her position—how different he was to that selfish, stupid Brian Rash-

leigh! though she was ready to grant that he was not absolutely ill-natured.

Luncheon time came all too soon, and Miss Parry with her mistress only arrived in time for it. Sybil could not suppress an amused smile as her eyes met Rashleigh's, when they took their places—remembering the unflattering manner in which she had spoken to him. He, however, was quite grave and inflexible, addressing his conversation almost exclusively to Mrs. Rashleigh, and giving her an account of his engagements for the next ten days.

As soon as she could catch Miss Parry alone, Sybil poured forth a history of the morning's interview; for which confidence she received a sound scolding from her attached friend.

"It was so imprudent—so uncalled-for, my dear," concluded Miss Parry. "No one could be so useful to you as Captain Rashleigh, if he liked, and *I* don't think him so bad at all. He is a cold silent man, but by no means unkind."

"I do not want his friendship! He looks on me as a poor, wretched, helpless waif, who has no rights; who only exists by the condescending beneficence of a superior being. I grant he is better than he used to be—less inhuman—but still, he is forbidding, and if you scold me about him I shall dislike him more than ever. There, let there be an end of the subject; we shall see very little of him for the next fortnight—and I have nearly lost a day with all this worry."

The day, however, was not without its compensation. Later, Sybil went to see Mrs. Price, the only friend left for her to visit, now that Mrs. Winter was

abroad for her health and would not return home till after the operation which was to be performed on her eyes in the ensuing spring. Mrs. Price was out, but Sybil made her way to the school-room. There the children gathered round her to tell how delightfully the new story in *Jack and Jill* was going on.

This was her own, accepted nearly a year before, but not begun in the periodical till about three months previously. Some friend sent the publication to the Price children, and their profound interest and candid criticism was a source of infinite pleasure to the young writer. "There is a lot in it just like the things you say, Sybil," exclaimed the eldest girl. "We are all longing for the next number."

"And I do like Dick" (the naughty boy), cried Fred, the third. "You know he is not bad really," and so on. The characters and incidents were all eagerly discussed, to Sybil's joy and satisfaction.

It is indeed a pure delight to a writer when the creations of his or her fancy are accepted as realities by sympathetic readers, when the drift of circumstances, the interaction of characters are perceived and appreciated. Then they feel they have not written in vain and that they have their reward.

* * * * *

The following day, Mrs. Rashleigh gave the first of a series of "return dinners" to the upper hundred of Lynchester. The bishop was invited, but he and Mrs. Dobbs were unfortunately absent. The dean, Mrs. and Miss Courteney, however, supplied their place very efficiently. Lady Elizabeth Rashleigh and her daughter graced the banquet; poor old John Rashleigh had a

bad cold and was desired to stay at home. The commanding officer of the regiment which had replaced the Rifles, Lady Mary Wyndham and her son, and other distinguished members of Lynshire society, were also present.

The dinner was irreproachable, the decorations tasteful. There was a good deal of talk on local matters, of course. The spell of provincialism is not easily broken, and the smallest squabble over an election to the local town council, the addition to the infirmary, the repair of the town hall, will elicit infinitely more interest and enthusiasm than the prospect of a European war, or a parliamentary measure of imperial importance.

Though everything went well, Brian Rashleigh was not pleased, and his stepmother perceived his discontent. What could be the matter? He had Lady Mary on one side and Lady Elizabeth on the other. The fair Aline had a lovely dress, and wore Brian's gold bangle. Then after dinner she was most amiable to him, and quite interested about the horse he had bought when he was last in town. She regretted she could not hunt, but as poor dear Papa no longer rode to hounds and Lady Elizabeth did not approve of her joining the hunt with only a groom to attend on her, she was obliged to give it up. To this Brian listened in a rather absent manner and was so brutal as to make no offer of acting escort to his cousin.

Lady Mary Wyndham's carriage was announced rather early, for she had a long drive before she could reach home, and this broke up the party. Colonel Walker, the commanding officer of the regiment now in

Lynchester, stayed to the last gossiping over some whiskey and seltzer with his host.

At last Mrs. Rashleigh was left alone with her son. He stood for some moments with his back to the fire in silence, then he asked: "Why wasn't Sybil Carew at dinner?" There was something startling in the abrupt directness of his question.

"Sybil rarely dines with us when I have a party," she replied suavely. "Dinners are not amusing to young people, and especially to a girl so averse to society as Sybil."

"I could understand that if the guests were all elderly; but Aline and Miss Courteney cannot be more than a year or two older than Sybil—and she must feel rather riled at being left out when other girls are asked!"

"Very good of you, my dear Brian, to think about her. But *I* do not think it wise to give her habits, and accustom her to society which may make her discontented with her future life—her future is exceedingly uncertain! I have little or nothing to leave behind me, and it is as well that Sybil should not be accustomed to a style of life——"

"In that case," interrupted Brian, "the sooner she makes a good marriage the better. Why don't you dress her well and take her out? There are lots of men would be pleased to marry a girl like that—she has a thoroughbred look, and could give no end of points to the two that were here to-night."

"Really, Brian, I cannot imagine where your eyes are! Sybil is not bad-looking, but to compare her with the elegant composure of Aline Rashleigh, the sprightly

grace of Isabel Courteney, is too absurd. Then she is eccentric—decidedly eccentric. I do not know if there is any taint of insanity in her father's family, but I should fear——”

“By George! I never saw a girl who had her wits about her more than Sybil has! Look here, mother” (as he occasionally called her), “We are to have another spread in a fortnight, eh? Well, you tell Sybil she must appear. Give her a pretty frock, and ten to one she'll jump at it. I'll ask young MacVitae (he is the son of that millionaire distiller in Greenock) and Captain Bernard, they are the best men among those quartered here now, and you'll see they'll be immensely taken. Why, I've seen fellows lose their heads about women that couldn't hold a candle to her.”

“A new evening dress!” exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh. “I do not think you have an idea what a good dinner dress would cost. She—Sybil—is so obstinate, I don't believe even such a bribe would induce her to appear. As to making a good marriage, I had one in my mind for her, and that worthy woman Mrs. Winter, the banker's wife (though we never spoke of it openly), did her best to promote the marriage—the man was her nephew and a rising young stockbroker in Freightsborough. What do you think Sybil did? She in some way brought about an engagement with an insignificant girl, the sister of a wretchedly poor Welsh curate—a perpetual curate, you know. The Winters were very much annoyed.”

Brian laughed. “I suppose the stockbroker was an ugly cad!” he said.

"It is scarcely delicate for a young girl to think of a man's looks," said Mrs. Rashleigh primly.

"Delicate or not, they all do," returned Brian. "Of course, if Sybil won't come to dinner she won't, and there's an end of it, but I would advise you to try and make her."

"Certainly I will, if you wish it, Brian. However, you will find when you have lived a little longer with us, that it is no easy task to manage such a girl as Sybil."

"Well, perhaps so," returned Brian carelessly, thinking with some amusement that both belligerents had recommended the same means of testing the truth of their complaints. "I'll wish you good-night; I haven't had my last weed yet!" he added, and left the room.

Lounging in his dressing-gown over a good fire, a cigar in his mouth, and a new book, on "The Velocity of Projectiles," open on his knee (for Brian Rashleigh diligently studied the scientific side of his profession), he deeply enjoyed the relief of solitude and freedom, after the mental buckram of his stepmother's party. But his thoughts wandered awhile before settling down to the subject before him.

"What a plucky little soul it is!" he mused. "She has a devil of a temper, I daresay. Mrs. Rashleigh doesn't go the right way to work to tame it. I think I could manage her better. But why the deuce does she dislike *me*? I never crossed her; she ought to see that I could be a good friend. Women rather like me in general, at any rate they are uncommonly sweet and smooth to me! I can't forget the calm defiance of her eyes when she told me she could not fancy being afraid

of me—and her eyes *can* speak. I should like to have punished her with a couple of kisses. What a fury she would have been in!! Well, I should not like to offend her. It must be awfully hard on such a creature to be shut up as she is. Why does my stepmother keep her down like a child, or an inferior? Dinner would be considerably jollier with a bright young girl for a third. Well, I'll see what's to be done to smooth matters, if it isn't too much trouble."

He knocked the ashes from his cigar and gave himself up to his book for a couple of hours before turning in.

The next day everything was forgotten save the joys of a splendid run with the Lynshire Hounds over a fine stretch of country with some severe water jumps, and others equally demanding skill in the riders and staying power in the horses. Rashleigh was one of the few in at the death and felt well satisfied with the performance of his new hunter. He dined with the officers of the regiment then occupying the Castle, and did not return till the inhabitants of the Priory were far on through their first sleep.

November was now upon them. On the whole the weather was tolerable; days of mild airs and grey tones were intermixed with others of rain and storm, but the dreaded frost spared them yet awhile.

One day, about a week before Mrs. Rashleigh's second entertainment, Brian, having no hunting or other engagement, appeared at the nine o'clock breakfast in an unusually amiable mood. Miss Parry had just made tea. It was a bright, cold morning, and Brian stood for a few moments before the fire looking at his letters.

"I hope my early tea doesn't interfere with yours now, as Sybil complained," he said good-humouredly.

"No," returned Miss Parry smiling. "I always find a fresh tea-pot ready for me. I am told your own man attends to your breakfast."

"Yes. I directed that he should. Isn't Sybil late? I am afraid she is a lazy boots!"

"Oh, no! but I sent her letters up, and I fancy she is reading them."

"Has she a vast correspondence?" he asked carelessly, while he helped himself to cold grouse.

"No, poor dear, so letters are especially welcome."

"Are they! It is a great bore having to answer them. Oh, here you are!" as Sybil came in. "Quarter of an hour late. Do you call that punctuality?"

"Good morning, Minty!" pausing to kiss her brow; then to Brian, "Oh, I do not pretend to be punctual. Of course if my grandmother breakfasted with us I should make it a point to be in time."

"But you do not think me worthy of such respect. Eh?"

"Well, you are not my grandfather!" returned Sybil.

"No, not exactly, I am happy to say! What will you have? Some grouse?"

"Yes, thank you. I feel quite hungry."

"The result of pleasant letters, I hope!"

"What do you know about my letters?" asked Sybil, with a smile.

"Ah! Miss Parry has been blabbing."

Sybil shook her head. "I shall never believe that! But they are, very pleasant." Here the newspapers

made their appearance, and Rashleigh spoke no more until Sybil, rising from table, went to the door.

"You have never shown me your special quarters," exclaimed Rashleigh, rising and throwing down the *Times*, "but I heard you playing there yesterday, when I was in the library, some Scotch airs—at least, I guessed you were the musician."

"Sybil is the only musician in the house," said Miss Parry. "Pray come in, Captain Rashleigh."

The oft-mentioned apartment was by no means so pleasant in winter as in summer, and Rashleigh noticed that the fire was laid, not lit. While he looked, Sybil took a match-box from the mantel-piece and set fire to the sticks. "I fancy it is a cold room," said Rashleigh. "I forget what it was used for long ago. Why don't you come and write in the library, Sybil? You seem a regular scribe," looking at her crowded writing-table. Sybil blushed.

"Oh, I have all my belongings here," she said with some embarrassment, "and I am better in my own territory."

"It is quite fine," he resumed. "Put on your hat, Sybil, and come with me to the stables. You haven't seen the horses yet." Miss Parry looked at her imploringly.

"Yes, I should like to see them," returned Sybil frankly, "we will go out by the garden door." In the passage leading to this door, partly under the stairs, hung some wraps and a small cap of the Glengarry shape, edged with dark fur, which Sybil put on, wrapping a plaid round her, and half amused, half surprised at the friendly relations so unexpectedly developing

between herself and Rashleigh, smiled at Miss Parry when he turned into the hall to fetch his hat.

"This is a capital hunter. I was in great luck to find her," he said, touching the hind-quarters of a great raking dark chestnut mare, to make her move over. "Grand hind-quarters, hasn't she? Legs as sound as a wild colt's, and a nice head; full of spirit, but not ill-tempered; a trifle too eager, perhaps. I'll manage all that when we come to know each other better. Eh! old girl!" patting her neck. "Won't you come up and stroke her?"

"No, thank you. I would rather not," said Sybil, keeping at a civil distance.

"Why?"

"Oh, it is such a big creature, and looks rather mischievous."

"You don't mean to say you are afraid? I thought you had no end of pluck."

"I'm afraid I haven't much."

"You must have seen lots of horses and all that belongs to them in Ireland. I am told your father was a first-rate man across country."

"I was little more than nine when I left it," said Sybil, flushing with pleasure at this mention of her father, of whom Mrs. Rashleigh always spoke as if he were a criminal at least. "Did you ever meet any one who knew my father?"

"Yes, more than one who had been quartered in his neighbourhood. He must have been a fine fellow and immensely liked." In so speaking, Rashleigh indeed played a winning card. Sybil said nothing for a few minutes, but she silently buried the hatchet.

"Well, come and look at this one. He is older and quieter than Lady Wildfire," and Brian walked to the next stall, tenanted by a handsome mottled brown horse with black points, who was quietly munching his corn, and did whatever he was told as to moving right or left. "He is smaller, but as good in his way. Won't you come up here and stroke him? He is quite amiable."

"I daresay he is, but I can admire him just as well here."

"He would make a nice lady's horse, Sybil. Would you like to try him?"

"No, thank you. I am too old to learn. I would rather not try."

"Well, it is a great pity;" but Sybil had wandered away to the stall where Mrs. Rashleigh's sturdy old pony was looking not too pleased at the new comers. With Sam she felt safe and at home; she stroked and patted him, even putting her head against his.

"And was he put away in a corner to make room for the great grand new horses?" she said. "But you are just as nice, Sam, in your own way—and an old friend, which is best of all."

"It's a great idea, apologizing to the old pony," said Rashleigh, smiling. "He ought to be pleased."

"And he is, poor dear! I will come to-morrow and bring you a carrot, Sam." The pony looked after her as she went away; turning at the door she kissed her hand to him. In the yard Oscar came and greeted his young mistress lovingly, accompanying her to the house.

"That's a nice collie of yours," said Rashleigh; "not quite thoroughbred, though."

"Isn't he? He is delightful, and that is the great point. I cannot call him mine, however. My possessions are few."

"Where does he come from?" asked Rashleigh.

"I will tell you his history some day," said Sybil, with a quick glance into his eyes and a slight smile.

"When you like," he returned. "By the way, are we to have the pleasure of your company at dinner next Thursday?"

Sybil shook her head. "Mrs. Rashleigh wished me to appear, but I begged off. It's no use beginning that sort of thing *now*. People would think I had been cured and let out of the lunatic asylum, where many think I have been shut up—or ought to have been shut up. No, I shall stay with Minty."

"Don't be obstinate. Mrs. Rashleigh will stand a spick and span new frock for the occasion. Won't that melt you?"

"I would rather pay the price of a frock, if I had it, to stay away. Now *do* you think these dinners worth putting on one's best clothes for?"

"Well, I cannot say I do," returned Rashleigh reluctantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEACE IS PROCLAIMED.

So Mrs. Rashleigh's second dinner was ungraced by Sybil's presence.

The day previous Mrs. Rashleigh had said, during the evening *tête-à-tête* with her stepson:

"I have complied with your suggestion, Brian, and asked Sybil to join us at dinner to-morrow, but, as I expected, in vain."

"I know," said Brian shortly. "I talked to her about it, and saw it was no use."

His stepmother was silent. It was a crucial moment, and opened up a vista of unexpected difficulty, even possible defeat. That Brian should hold independent communication with Sybil, and evidently lean towards that side of the matter, was startling. Mrs. Rashleigh had never counted on such a contingency. To her, Sybil was so absolutely insignificant and unattracting that the possibility of Brian ever noticing her, or being interested in her, had not occurred to the unsympathetic grandmother. If it proved that Sybil was able to influence the potent Brian, she was an antagonist to be reckoned with. "I must deal cautiously in the matter," mused Mrs. Rashleigh. "Whatever sense of comparison or interest Brian may feel, it will not last. He is remarkably indifferent to women, and

now the hunting has begun, no mere half-developed girl, like Sybil, who has just escaped being ugly, will get much thought or attention from him. He is going to stay at Dene Court at Christmas, and if he entertains the idea of marrying Aline (and he certainly was not averse to it at one time, judging from his letters), he must not postpone it. Aline is of age, and Lady Elizabeth certainly expects the affair to be settled by the spring. I fear Brian will be difficult to manage, and if there is another discordant element added, it will be infinitely annoying. For the present I must not mention Sybil's name. I wish I could send her somewhere—I should not mind giving her an outfit. But I cannot, she is such a hermit, she knows no one."

These reflections had the effect of smoothing and softening Mrs. Rashleigh's aspect and manner to her granddaughter. But she managed the process deftly, speaking each day a little more than usual to Sybil—not too amiably, but as if willing to be gracious if she might be—a line of conduct which made no impression whatever on that young person, although she was perfectly well-bred and respectful to the lady of the house.

This week was cheered by a longer letter than usual from Tremaine. He wrote in excellent spirits. He was at last beginning to understand the working of the business and the spirit of the thing; moreover, the fever of money-making had touched him.

"The Chinese" he continued, "are the most curious specimens of humanity I have ever encountered, and to live in this country is enough to make the most inveterate Conservative turn his coat. I wish it were a livelier place to ask you to come to, my darling. I

fear I am rather selfish; but my thought by day—my dream by night—is to see you again,” etc., etc.

“Dickson—our manager here—a very dry shrewd sort of man, but not a bad fellow, has had a sharp attack of fever. He talks of going home in the spring; then I may get a step. Though I am afraid I cannot hope to be manager yet, still I am doing better of late than I expected. Any way I get on very well with John Chinaman. Six months more may make great changes, and I think I may look forward to the rapture of a run home to carry off my heart’s treasure, never to part again.”

“Six months,” thought Sybil, “that seems wonderfully near. I cannot believe that my emancipation can be so soon accomplished! Ah, how good Dick is to undertake a life so opposed to all his tastes and habits, for my sake—for mine, a penniless, insignificant girl, with really not much to recommend me except that I am true, and that I *can* love with all my heart. Well, Dick dear, I will do *my* best to make your life happy. Oh, Minty,” as her friend came into the room, “I have a delightful letter this time. Dick seems ever so much brighter. It makes me so miserable about him when he seems depressed,” and she proceeded to read out some portions of the letter, over which Araminta rejoiced unselfishly.

“Do you know, Sybil,” she said, after a short pause, “I think, when you go away, I shall look out for another engagement. I do not think I could bear this house when you are gone. Though I must say that on the whole Mrs. Rashleigh has been rather nice to me, she is not exactly the sort of person to become ten-

derly attached to. I think, too, I should like to be near my brother in London. He is a clerk in Somerset House, you know, and lives in West Kensington. His wife is a sweet woman but very delicate. They have a large family," etc., etc. For once Araminta seemed inclined to talk of her own affairs. She found in Sybil a warmly sympathetic listener, and for a while they discussed the future, till Miss Parry, glancing at the clock, uttered an exclamation of dismay, "Half-past eleven! and I am afraid that clock is slow, I haven't nearly done my morning's work. It is amazing how much more I have to do since Captain Rashleigh came."

"I dare say you have," said Sybil thoughtfully. "He is a troublesome kind of man, but not half as bad as I expected. How civil Mrs. Rashleigh is growing since her beloved stepson showed me some recognition. I *should* like to ask him who it was that knew my father. But I will not begin subjects with him."

"Take my advice, dear—be as friendly as you can," were Miss Parry's last words as she left the room.

"I hardly see anything of Minty now," thought Sybil, as she placed herself at her writing-table. "Poor dear Minty, she is the only creature I shall regret in leaving England."

Rashleigh had started only that morning for a distant meet, and was still absent when they sat down to luncheon.

That meal passed in nearly complete silence, as Mrs. Rashleigh was evidently in deep and not very agreeable thought. She soon despatched her luncheon, and, addressing Miss Parry, observed, "I shall be ready in half-an-hour," then left the room.

"I am to drive with your grandmamma to Dene Court this afternoon. She had a note from Lady Elizabeth about an hour ago, and decided on going."

"I am so sorry," returned Sybil. "It is fine and not very cold; I did want a nice walk with you."

"It cannot be helped," said Miss Parry, as she went away to put her bonnet on.

As soon as they were gone, Sybil arrayed herself in a warm jacket and fur-edged cap; then calling Oscar, she started on a long walk across the open common, as the leafless woods were somewhat damp and cheerless. Oscar gambolled round her for a while, and then settled down to his usual steady pace, and Sybil found ample companionship in her own thoughts. Life seemed fairer to her than it had ever done since she parted from her kind kinsfolk. She looked forward with tranquil pleasure to life with Tremaine. He was so sweet and sunny in nature, and she felt so sure she could make him happy. She hoped his people would like her. She even smiled in triumph at the idea of announcing her approaching marriage to her astonished grandmother. Sometimes she talked aloud to Oscar, sometimes she counted up the small sums she had put away in her money-box, and added what she expected to get for the work on which she was now engaged. Why, she could get quite a respectable trousseau, according to her modest notions, without troubling her grandmother.

At this point of her reflections she had reached the further corner of the common, where the high road, emerging from the Bobingham woods, skirted it on the south-west, and, calling Oscar, who had run on ahead, she turned homewards along the road.

The sound of horses' feet coming after her struck her ear, and in another minute Rashleigh in his red coat and tops rode up.

"Captain Rashleigh!" she exclaimed, in some surprise.

"So far from home?" he said, dismounting and passing the bridle over his arm. "Why, it will be dark in another half-hour! It isn't safe to be out on this lonely road at nightfall."

"There is nothing to fear. I am accustomed to go everywhere alone."

"You ought not. And remember I will not be called Captain Rashleigh by you. How have I sinned that you should put me off at such a distance. You must promise to speak to me as——You know my name. What is it?"

"Brian," she returned smiling. "You know we really are strangers, but if you wish it, Brian, I will call you so."

"By the way, what sort of relations are we? I am a sort of a step-uncle to you."

Sybil shook her head. "We are neither kith nor kin."

"Never mind, friendship is better than relationship. Where is your inseparable companion, Miss Parry?"

Sybil explained.

"Why didn't your grandmother take *you* with her?"

"Because she prefers Miss Parry, naturally."

"You are very philosophic."

"I am now. I used to make myself miserable, and cry my eyes out (my tears come rather easily perhaps). That was long ago when I wanted to like her, and to

make her like me. Now I see it is impossible! we could not like each other, so I do not care so much—not at all indeed—only she need not be unjust.”

“Well, women are incomprehensible creatures! I never could make them out, not that I have tried much.”

“I dare say men are quite as incomprehensible to us, but I have known so few that I cannot judge.”

Sybil's tone was by no means aggressive, and Rashleigh wisely avoided a discussion.

“Do you never go to Dene Court?”

“Not now. I have been there twice, long ago. Miss Parry took me, and Lady Elizabeth was nice enough. She is certainly a gentlewoman, and Miss Rashleigh is everything she ought to be.”

“Exactly,” he returned laughing. “That just describes her. Then, as you found them all right, why didn't you go again?”

“Because I quite understood my grandmother did not wish me to go.”

“That is conflicting evidence, *she* says *you* wouldn't.”

“Ah, believe which you like. It is not worth while talking about,” said Sybil, somewhat sadly.

“I am going over to luncheon to-morrow,” resumed Rashleigh, looking down into her eyes, which had a charm for him he had never felt before. “My uncle wants to see me. Now suppose you come with me? The weather promises to be fine, and you have never seen my last acquirement, a useful hack to drive in the dog-cart or ride. Will you come?”

“I think I should like to go if—if you do not think it will seem strange to Lady Elizabeth, my going there uninvited.”

"No, of course it will not. She said one day she was sorry you never came. At any rate, *I* am responsible."

"Shall you stay long?" asked Sybil uneasily.

"No, not very. We'll arrive about lunch time. After, I must have some talk with my uncle, and leave you to the women. We can get here by tea-time. Will that do?"

"Thank you, yes. I am afraid Mrs. Rashleigh will not be pleased."

"That's her affair; she has no business to be *dis*-pleased. Why, you never get an inch outside the walls unless you walk."

"I enjoy walking."

"Well, I hope you will enjoy a drive to-morrow."

"I always like driving poor old Sam."

"Not a very exciting amusement."

They walked on for a few minutes, Sybil reflecting that Rashleigh was a good deal better than she expected.

"Did you have a good run?" she asked.

"Nothing worth the name. Killed the first fox in half an hour, and couldn't find another. We had luncheon at Dereham Castle, and then I came on home. What have *you* been doing?"

"Oh, my usual work, mending and writing."

"Are you writing a novel?" asked Rashleigh, smiling.

"No; I wish I could."

"Don't wish anything of the kind. I hate women who write."

"Why?"

"They are generally old and ugly, and quarrelsome. But that description doesn't apply to you—at least not altogether. You are certainly neither old nor ugly, but I am not sure you are not quarrelsome."

"I don't think I am," returned Sybil reflectively. "Some things I resent very much, but I never quarrel with Miss Parry."

"No, of course you don't. She would let you wipe your feet upon her. I can see that plain enough."

Sybil laughed. "I never thought you took so much notice of two insignificant dependents like Miss Parry and myself."

"You would bristle with indignation if anyone else called you insignificant."

"Perhaps I should. It would be rude and impertinent to tell me so, but probably the truth of the assertion would give it its worst sting."

Talking lightly, time and distance were considerably shortened, and the incongruous companions seemed to reach the Priory stables surprisingly soon.

"You never come down here now," said Rashleigh, giving the reins to his groom.

"Yes I do, but not often. I bring a carrot or sugar to Sam sometimes, just to show him he is not forgotten, or I want to find Oscar, but I am afraid of your horses, and your servant is strange to me."

"I can't fancy that you are a coward."

"Well, I am in some ways."

They walked up the path to the garden door, where Sybil found that Oscar had followed them.

"Well, he shall come in then and have tea, poor dear," she said. "I often take him into our room."

"He behaves very well. As you will not invite me to tea, I must invite you." Rashleigh rang the bell, and told the servant who came at his summons to serve tea in the library.

"Has Miss Parry come in?" asked Sybil.

"She came in with Mrs. Rashleigh quite an hour ago, miss, but she has gone out again. Mrs. Rashleigh complained of a chill, and has had tea in her own room."

"Let Miss Parry know that tea is ready in the library when she comes in."

Rashleigh went on and opened the door. "Ha! there's a splendid fire here, Sybil; very different from the few embers *you* cherish in *your* territory."

Sybil, having hung up her cap and jacket, followed him. A warm glow suffused the room. The firelight danced on the dark polished furniture and gleamed on the backs of the books which lined three sides of the room. Rashleigh stood by the hearth, looking very tall in his red coat and top boots, and Sybil drew a chair to the table at the further side from the fire, while Oscar took possession of the hearthrug.

"Won't you come to the fire?" asked Rashleigh.

"Thank you—the room is quite warm enough. Oscar cannot know himself in such splendid quarters."

And Sybil put up her hands to feel if her hair was too dreadfully wild, for Brian Rashleigh was looking at her so steadily that she feared she must be an object.

Tea was brought in and a large lamp lit, while Sybil, feeling unusually bright, proceeded "to pour out." At her age, the prospect of a pleasant day, the possible discomfiture of her arch enemy, Mrs. Rashleigh,

the fun and satisfaction of finding Rashleigh, her *bête noire*, transforming himself into a friend and ally, was quite enough to give a rose-coloured tinge to the passing hour.

"I suppose you do not take sugar?" she said, passing him his cup.

"Why?" he asked, drawing a chair to the end of the table, so as to face her.

"Oh, I hardly know. You don't look as if you wanted sugar."

"I certainly have not cared for sweet things hitherto," said Rashleigh, with a grim smile. "The taste may be developed, however," and he stretched his hand for the sugar basin.

"Ah! Oscar, you are a mean dog! You didn't actually beg, but you have come over to sit beside me and tell me with your beautiful brown eyes you want bread and butter. There—there is a large piece. Now go and lie down." The sagacious creature obeyed.

"He is a nice dog, and disposed to be friendly," observed Rashleigh.

"If he but knew all, he would not be friendly with *you*."

"How so? What's the mystery about Oscar?"

"I will tell you," she returned, drawn into confidence by the cosy circumstances of their interview, and a dawning consciousness that Rashleigh was more anxious to please her than *she* was to please him. In a few words she described the rescue and concealment of the doomed puppy, of his recovery, and the comfort he had been to her.

Rashleigh listened in much surprise. "What a

tenacious little creature you must have been even then!" he said. "Why, you were a mere child then."

"I wish I had ~~been~~," said Sybil, the tears gathering unknown to her. "I should have suffered less. I was the most miserable little wretch on earth then. There was not a soul in the wide world to love me or care for me, and I felt my grandmother hated me. Only the cook was kind—she is here still—and the poor puppy loved me and looked to me for protection. I think if you had killed him I should have thrown myself into the river. No one made me feel myself so small as you did, Brian. My cousin's husband and the gentlemen we knew in France were so nice and gentle and ready to talk to me. *You* were too grand and high even to see so poor a little waif as I was. I thought my heart would have broken—that I should have died—when you refused my prayer for Oscar with such cold contempt. Don't laugh at me. It was a bitter time."

"Instead of breaking your own, you have lived probably to break some one else's heart," returned Rashleigh, pulling his moustaches thoughtfully. "I must have been an awful brute."

"Well, yes, I think you were," said Sybil candidly; then, touched by his evident penitence, she added, "But you are much nicer now. Some people grow better and kinder as they grow older," was her apologetic conclusion. "Another cup, Brian?" she added, with shy conciliation.

He gave it to her in silence, took it back full, stirred it for a moment, and then broke out again, "Yes, I must have been an awful brute. Look here,

Sybil, will you try to forget all this, and let me make up for it? I want to be good friends with you—I do indeed. Don't be an irreconcilable Sybil."

"Oh, no! I am not quite unreasonable—especially when any one confesses his or her errors," she returned smiling, though a slight quiver in her voice hurt his awakening heart as nothing else had ever done.

"All right!" exclaimed Rashleigh, who was not eloquent by nature. "Your hand on it," he added, stretching out his own. Sybil put hers into it, lifting her eyes, still slightly suffused, and brilliant with the colour called into her cheeks by the warmth of the room after the cold air.

"What a contrast to my big brown fist," said Rashleigh, looking down on her small white slender fingers and smiling. "Why, I could crush it into a mash, I fancy," and he closed his own tightly.

"Pray do not," returned Sybil, struggling to release it. "That would be a bad beginning for our friendship."

"You don't suppose I would hurt you?" asked Rashleigh, slowly relaxing his grip.

"I am not sure. You may turn out a monster of cruelty, for all I know," said Sybil, laughing. "At all events, I want some more tea and a good deal of bread and butter. I am quite hungry."

"Come here, Oscar," called Rashleigh. The dog came to him and "gave the paw." "Accept my hearty apologies for my murderous intentions. I shall hand you over to your protectress, to have and to hold from henceforth."

"Thank you!" exclaimed Sybil; "but please do not

make your gift public. If Mrs. Rashleigh did not think him your dog, there would be no room for him here."

"I'll see to that," said Rashleigh; and they spoke of other things for awhile, until he abruptly changed the subject.

"Have you no wish to ride, Sybil? That brown horse would carry a lady well. He is a quiet, well-tempered brute, and you might have a worse riding-master than myself."

"Thank you very much, Brian; but it is rather late to begin. Then I have no habit, or hat, or anything."

"Don't let that stop you!" exclaimed Rashleigh eagerly. "I should be delighted to stand a riding rig-out."

"You are too good!" said Sybil, colouring rather deeply. "Do not think me ungrateful or disagreeable, but you are not an old enough or near enough friend yet, to give me presents."

"Excuse me," he returned. "I didn't mean to offend you. I am afraid I am rather a blundering blockhead. *You* must polish me up."

"According to Mrs. Rashleigh, I want a good deal of polishing myself."

"She has original views." He leant back in his chair, and glancing at the clock, went on, "It is uncommonly jolly sitting here talking to you. Mind, you are to invite me to tea in *your* den to-morrow. It's a horrid nuisance to be obliged to go and dress, but I am due at the Wyndhams' at 7.30, and there's a long drive first. By the way, when shall we start to-morrow?"

"Whenever you like."

"Say 12.15. Get down just in time for luncheon."

"I hope Lady Elizabeth will not——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Rashleigh. "It is no matter what she will, or will not. We are going to have a jolly drive, and——"

He was interrupted in his turn by the entrance of Miss Parry. She looked cold, and had not her usual kindly smile—in short, her eyes were suspiciously red and her expression troubled.

"How nice and comfortable you look!" were her first words.

"Do sit down, Minty! There is still some quite good tea," cried Sybil. Rashleigh placed a chair, and rang the bell.

"Miss Carew has eaten all the bread and butter," he said. "I must order some more."

Araminta looked up, a good deal surprised at the friendly tone which had sprung up between Sybil and the detested Brian. Rashleigh stood talking yet a little while longer. He took the plate from the servant, and handed the bread and butter to Miss Parry, and at last, with a smile to Sybil, tore himself away. "You are quite right to make a stand against these long dinners; they are an infernal bore," was his last emphatic sentence, addressed to Sybil, as he left the room.

She looked at Miss Parry with a little triumphant nod. "I have had it out with him about Oscar," she said, "and made him see how unkind and cruel he was. I really think he is sorry; he was quite nice about it. I must teach him a new view of life," she added, with a saucy air of superiority. "I shall make something of him by the time he goes away. Do you know he has asked me to go with him to luncheon at Dene Court

to-morrow? Won't Mrs. Rashleigh open her eyes! I am not so sure I quite like going, only the drive will be pleasant, and the joy of astonishing my grandmother, great! I must brush my cap well, and I do wish my jacket was fresher. But—" interrupting herself, "Minty, what is the matter with you? I am chattering on selfishly, and you are in trouble! What is the matter?"

"I am very anxious about my sister-in-law. I heard a few days ago that she had a very severe cold, and to-day I had a letter by the second post—I found it when we came in this evening—and she is much worse, quite dangerously ill. Think of the anxiety for my poor brother, with all those dear children; and she is so delicate to begin with."

"I am sorry! I do trust, dear, you will have better news to-morrow. She is young, is she not?"

"Well, yes! Her eldest boy is nearly twelve. And we must hope for the best. I told Mrs. Rashleigh as soon as I had read the letter, but she said nothing about letting me go."

"But, Minty, you must insist on going! Don't mind her! I'll do all I can of your work. She has not bought you body and soul!"

"No, dear. But I don't want to quarrel with her as long as you are here. I think I am some use and comfort to you, dear Sybil."

"Use and comfort to me! Why, Minty, I don't know what would become of me without you—you dear, kind, unselfish Minty! Why I cannot bear the thought of leaving you, even to go to Dick!"

And Sybil, starting up, threw her arms round her.

CHAPTER XV.

PROGRESS AND CIVILISATION.

THE next morning rose clear and crisp. The post brought no letters for Miss Parry, and Sybil told her that no news was good news.

Rashleigh was the last to appear. He looked unusually animated and good-humoured. In reply to Sybil's remark that he was growing lazy and self-indulgent in the Capri of Lynchester, he laughed and said she was all wrong. "I went down to the 'Royal' stables to see if the bay was in good condition and ready for the road. I haven't bought him yet. I have him on trial. He seems very fit. Fine morning, but decidedly frosty. We'll have a jolly drive; mind you wrap up well, Sybil."

"I had better tell Mrs. Rashleigh you are going to Dene Court; she may have a message to send."

"Very well! We'll start about 12.15," returned Brian.

"She will not be pleased," said Sybil.

"She ought to be, as she has complained of your refusing Lady Elizabeth's invitations. It seems to be my mission to put crooked things straight. Why don't you go and tell her yourself?"

"No! Captain—I mean Brian," for he looked up reproachfully—"it would seem like impertinence be-

cause I had *you* to back me. And when I am not absolutely 'riled,' I do not want to be disrespectful to an old lady."

"Do as you like! Only don't keep the horse waiting; many horses if kept standing in the shafts get into a bad temper."

"I shall be quite punctual," said Sybil, and she went away to finish a few pages before going to enjoy that very rare event for her—a day's pleasure.

Miss Parry ascended to Mrs. Rashleigh's room—not without some trepidation. After discussing, as usual, the order of housework and food for the day, Miss Parry said gently, "Captain Rashleigh desired me to say he is going to drive over to Dene Court to luncheon, if you have any message, and he has persuaded Sybil to accompany him."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh. Anger and mortification both were in her tone, and then she kept silent for some moments, while Miss Parry arranged sundry account and memorandum books in their places. While she did so, her mistress worked a rule-of-three sum in her head, the factors of which were herself, Sybil and Brian. She saw at a glance that if the second and third terms amalgamated, the first would be nowhere. She could hardly believe her ears. That Brian Rashleigh—cold, self-contained, and only interested in his own sport and business, accustomed too to elegant and fashionable women, should absolutely invite an ill-dressed nobody to drive with him—it was incredible? What did it mean? Could it be possible that the unaccountable vagaries of masculine nature might tend to a blind preference for a creature who

(in Mrs. Rashleigh's opinion) had narrowly escaped plainness. "She hasn't a decent feature except her eyes," thought the antagonistic old woman, "and am I to be turned out of house and home by a pair of grey eyes!" For, judging by herself, she did not hesitate to conclude that, given the establishment of Sybil's influence over Brian, her tenure of her comfortable abode, the Priory, would indeed be short.

However matters might end, she must act with circumspection. Backed by Brian Rashleigh, Sybil was no longer a foe to be despised.

"No," she said, "I do not think there is any message. The basket that came last night might be returned, and that net Lady Elizabeth forgot the other day." She spoke in a natural tone, for she had recovered herself and resolved on her plan of action. She would gradually, imperceptibly glide from a tone of harsh indifference to one of gentle and slightly melancholy consideration, as though her advances had been originally scorned.

"Thank you, Miss Parry, I don't think there is anything more to be settled at present," she said mildly. "By the way, if you think Sybil really needs a frock, perhaps she had better have one before Christmas. You might call round at Brown's and get some patterns and estimates."

"Very well, Mrs. Rashleigh, I will gladly do so. I do think she needs a new dress, jacket and hat."

Mrs. Rashleigh took up the newspaper as a token that the interview was over.

At 12.15 Sybil made her way to the stables. She found Rashleigh inspecting his turn-out and issuing

short sharp orders to his own groom and a man from the livery stables, which they executed with prompt obedience.

"Ah! there you are—well up to time." "What do you think of the bay?" exclaimed Rashleigh, on seeing her.

"He looks very handsome," she returned, "what a beautiful glossy coat! and what a smart cart!"

Rashleigh turned and looked attentively at her as she spoke.

"Pray do not look at me!" she exclaimed, colouring vividly, with a girlish sense of annoyance at her well-worn clothes. "I am not half smart enough to drive in so grand a turn-out."

"That is not exactly what I was thinking," said Rashleigh, smiling. "My dog cart and myself are honoured by your presence. Now I shall get in and give you a hand up."

Another minute the gate was thrown open and the bay started at a good pace down the narrow lane between the wall and the Priory, and so on to the north road skirting the town.

The bay, a strong, somewhat eager animal, trotted rapidly, and Sybil, unaccustomed to the rapid motion, grasped the side of her seat very tightly indeed.

"It seems to be frightfully high up," she said.

"Yes, one has a good view of the country from a machine of this description. There's a more picturesque road than this, but it is a little longer, and as my uncle is awfully riled if one is late for luncheon we had better go direct."

He touched his horse with the whip and the animal

replied by an impatient bound, darting on at a tremendous pace till reined in by Rashleigh, and Sybil's heart ceased to beat violently.

"The country at this side is rather flat," said Rashleigh by-and-by, when he had reduced Rufus to a more sober condition, "but it is more up and down about my uncle's place. I fancy you are an ardent admirer of the beauties of nature?"

"How do you know?"

"I don't know, I only guess, but somehow I feel you are—something about your face says so. Well, so am I—in a way. I have seen some superb scenery in India. But I don't know that I ever enjoy anything so much as regular typical English scenery. There is such a curious likeness between the face of a country and the character of the natives. Look at the comfort, the cultivation, the order, the old established customs of England, and you will find a counterpart in the scenery; there are fields and hedge-rows, stretches of common, grassy margins to the well-kept roads, cheerful villages and stately homes, bits of woodland, snug farms, also hovels and neglected potato patches. Just like the life, industry, persevering ambition, individuality, freedom, recognition of duty and common sense running through all—to say nothing of moral failures, idle scamps and unlucky dogs which sprinkle every quarter of the globe."

"Yes, that is quite true! And in India?" said Sybil.

"Oh, everything is on a bigger scale, you have elephants and snakes, jungles and huge breathless plains, monstrous mountains, gorgeous colouring. So among the people you have a corresponding social system, grand chiefs and learned priests, steeped in lore gathered

when our ancestors fed on hips and haws; also treacherous crawling cads, the cruellest injustice alongside the highest ideals, generosity, meanness, artistic freedom, individuality in irons, picturesqueness, ugliness, scarcely a trace of common sense, and absolute incapacity for truth."

"You must have thought a good deal while you were hunting and shooting," said Sybil, much interested.

"I don't know, I suspect it's a case of unconscious cerebration," returned Rashleigh, with a short laugh.

Here this philosophic conversation was suddenly interrupted.

A man in a smock frock turned into a field through a wide gate, pushing it open and leaving it to swing back with a bang.

This offended Rufus, who stood up and then dashed on at a great pace. Sybil, greatly alarmed, grasped Rashleigh's arm.

"You must not hold me," he said quickly and sternly. "I cannot manage him if you do." Sybil saw he was in earnest; she mastered herself and sat with her hands tightly clasped, expecting her last moment. After a sharp struggle, for Rufus endeavoured twice more to bolt, Rashleigh brought him to his senses, and they reached the gate of Dene Court.

"I am awfully vexed that you should have been frightened," said Rashleigh, looking down into her face. "I wanted you to have a pleasant time of it, and you are looking as white as a sheet."

"I am foolish and tiresome I daresay—at least I must seem so to you; but I have not been accustomed to horses and driving," said Sybil apologetically.

"You have the best kind of courage; you can master your own fears. I am afraid I spoke roughly: I am naturally rough."

"No; you were right to startle me into quietness," she returned. "It was an awful moment to *me*."

Rashleigh murmured something between his teeth which Sybil did not catch.

"What a nice old place!" she said, looking round. For some way the avenue led through clumps of beech trees and then emerged on a stretch of grazing land which rose abruptly, the top of the height being crowned by woods, among which could be caught glimpses of the house, a rambling Elizabethan mansion, much added to, pieced and patched, till it became a representative building, exemplifying many periods of English architecture.

Surmounting the hill, they drove round a turn which brought them to the front of the house. Here the ground fell steeply to a stream and permitted a wide view across an open country to some low blue hills. The chief entrance was from a gravelled sweep formed by a species of rampart, the wall and low battlement of which were built of the red stone which abounds in that part of the country. As soon as the crunching of wheels was heard a butler and footman appeared at the door and a groom came through the evergreens from the path leading to the stables; each vied with the other in obsequious attention to the visitors. Before they ascended the steps Lady Elizabeth herself appeared in the hall—a large square apartment with a double staircase at the back and a large oak table in the middle; figures in armour stood against the walls, and the

general effect was exceedingly baronial, at least to Sybil's eyes.

"Why, Miss Carew, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure!" she exclaimed, in evident surprise. "Your powers of persuasion, Brian, must be considerably more potent than Mrs. Rashleigh's or mine. Glad you have so fine a day, though it is cold. How do you do, Brian? Come in; your uncle is not very well. Come, Miss Carew, Aline will be pleased to see you."

Sybil had flushed crimson at Lady Elizabeth's speech, and felt that Rashleigh's eyes were on her. With a strong effort she regained composure, determined that Brian's friendly wish to give her a pleasant day should not be frustrated, at least in appearance.

"You are very good to let me in after my refusal to come; but though I did refuse I should have liked to come. I suppose I used to be shy," she said.

"I'm sure we are not formidable people," returned Lady Elizabeth good-humouredly, and she led the way into the drawing-room. It was large and imposing, though the furniture was as old as the Regency and had a worn, faded aspect. A big fire and a number of plants gave something of comfort and grace to the room. Mr. Rashleigh, a shrivelled old man, was half-buried deep in an easy-chair beside the fire.

"Here is Miss Carew!" said Lady Elizabeth in very audible tones. "She has not been here for ages."

"Ah!—oh! Very glad I am sure," he said vacantly. "Been on the Riviera?"

"No, she has come from the Priory; you remember Mrs. Rashleigh's granddaughter?"

"Ah, yes—exactly! Brian, my boy, very glad you

have come. The horses are going to the devil! I'm not what I was—those fellows don't mind me a bit! We'll have a look round after lunch; I'm not at all satisfied with Jackson. Hanged if I think he gives the poor brutes their proper allowances of corn!"

"I thought he was a good man. But, as you say, we'll have a look round," returned Rashleigh soothingly.

"Why the dooce don't you put up here, Brian? You'd find it more homelike and a help to me; it's an awful sell not to have a son to look after things. What's the use of a girl?" Again Sybil coloured and looked uneasily at Lady Elizabeth, but she was perfectly unmoved.

"Girls, sir?" returned Rashleigh, rather awkwardly (he was of the school which called its elders "sir," but did not respect them a bit more for all that), "why, girls are meant to be ornamental."

Here the gong made itself heard, and almost immediately the butler entered and said, "Luncheon is on the table, my lady."

"There—give her ladyship your arm, Brian. Come, Miss—a—I'm not good at names; you must take me for want of better."

"I am very glad to do so," said Sybil, with a sweet kindly smile.

"Ha! you seem to fulfil the end of your being, according to Brian's theory—eh?" Leaning on his stick and hugging Sybil's slight arm to his side as if for further support, he tottered into a huge and somewhat chilly dining-room. Here they were joined by the sedate Aline. She was almost cordial to her cousin, and

gracious to Sybil as if they had met the day before. She asked for Mrs. Rashleigh, and observed it must be very enlivening to have Brian staying at the Priory; asked if she had heard Miss Courteney sing since she had been in Paris and had lessons from the great Pian-gini; and added that it was greatly to be regretted that there was no piano at the Priory.

The name caught old Rashleigh's ear. "Ah, yes—a doosid comfortable house, and my poor brother's wife is a doosid shrewd clever old woman! Buy and sell us all, give you my word! Only one who could ever manage Brian here! She has always been as hard as nails; I dare say she's saving a pot of money, living rent-free all these years—eh? Do you happen to know Mrs. Rashleigh, of the Priory?" (to Sybil).

"I ought," she returned laughing, her clear, soft tones making themselves heard in his best ear; "I live with her."

"Hey—what? Are you the little wild Irish girl that was sent over to her, years ago? Ay! I remember. She was doosidly put out, I can tell you."

"I hope she is more reconciled to me now," said Sybil, with admirable temper and self-possession. "Very young people are generally troublesome to the old."

"She is doosid lucky to have such a bright creature as you are in the house," said the old man admiringly. "Wakeley, champagne to Miss—Miss——"

"Carew," suggested Sybil.

"Ay, to be sure—I remember now—Miss Carew."

The butler looked in his perplexity to her ladyship, who presented a stony front. A grim look of amusement came into Rashleigh's face. Sybil hastened to

relieve the general embarrassment: "I never take wine, Mr. Rashleigh."

"And you must not touch champagne, you know, squire," cried Lady Elizabeth promptly.

"Ah, you see, I am nowhere now! Can't ride to hounds, or shoot, or drink a glass of fiz, or anything—doosidly dull existence! I'll have a glass of sherry, anyhow—eh, my lady?"

"Certainly, my dear! Dr. Saville Row says you may have three glasses a day."

"Do you drink sherry, Brian?"

"Thank you, no. Claret is my usual beverage."

"Gad! what a set of pippin-squeezers young men are nowadays! but please yourself—please yourself."

So luncheon progressed, Lady Elizabeth absorbing most of the talk. As soon as the servants withdrew, Mr. Rashleigh groped for his stick, and called out in his shrill but authoritative tones: "Come, Brian, if you won't take any more wine, let's get away. The evening closes in so soon, and I want to speak to you about one or two things, besides looking through the stables."

Brian rose immediately and followed his uncle, who hobbled out of the room faster than might have been expected.

"Poor Mr. Rashleigh is losing his memory," said Lady Elizabeth apologetically. "You must not misunderstand him. He talks oddly, but he really has a high regard for your grandmother."

"I am sure he has. He said she was very sharp and clever—that is complimentary, is it not?"

"Very good of you to look at it in that light," returned Lady Elizabeth, laughing. "Aline! what have

you been doing this morning, my love? Painting? Well, take Miss Carew to your den and show her your work. She probably paints, herself."

"No indeed! I am not at all accomplished," said Sybil, shaking her head. "I should like to see Miss Rashleigh's work."

So the all-perfect Aline led her visitor to her very charming morning-room, which occupied an angle of the many-sided dwelling, and showed some of her treasures. The painting was a rather stiff group of flowers copied from a coloured print. There were collections of dried flowers and an elaborately arranged stamp album. To Sybil all this was weary work. At last they were summoned to the drawing-room—to her relief.

"Brian says he is going in half-an-hour," said Lady Elizabeth, as the two girls came in. "He is just looking through some papers with your father in the study, and Miss Carew must have a cup of tea."

"Thank you! I believe we are to be back in time for tea, and before I go I should like so much to hear Miss Rashleigh play," said Sybil persuasively.

"Certainly," returned her ladyship with great readiness. "Aline, dear, play something."

In truth she had been meditating profoundly on the astounding fact that Brian Rashleigh, an extra hard man of the world, who never put himself out for mortal, and who was credited with the utmost flintiness towards women, should have deigned to bring Mrs. Rashleigh's insignificant, dependent, reprehensible waif of a granddaughter to see the heads of the family, suggested serious possibilities. At any rate, if the heir of the

house, who was already well off, and who could interfere seriously with her plans for certain thinning of the timber and other money-making machinations (all of which were intended to swell their savings for Aline), chose to pick up the flimsy ragged web of Sybil Carew's existence, even temporarily, it was not for her—Lady Elizabeth—to cross his fancy. No; that would indeed be short-sighted folly. Opposition was the one thing needful to confirm Brian in any line of conduct he might adopt. Fortunately the girl was not especially pretty, and always ill—that is, poorly—dressed.

“Though there is something taking about her! The squire (Mr. Rashleigh) was immensely pleased with her. Still, Brian will hardly perceive that. He will marry from a sense of duty, and make a very good husband. But he is not the sort of man to lose his head about any woman. I must be civil to this girl,” was Lady Elizabeth's conclusion, as she sat in silence, as if enjoying the “*Fantaisie*” with which her daughter was maltreating the keys of a “grand Erard,” while she carefully “took stock” of Sybil's good and weak points. The longer she looked the fewer faults she found.

“Why, she *might* be dressed into beauty!” she said to herself, as Aline came to an end with a faint die-away scamper up the treble notes and one half-inaudible arpeggio chord in the bass.

“How dreadfully difficult it must be!” exclaimed Sybil, in awed admiration. “You must have practised a great deal.”

“Yes; Aline has great application,” observed her mother. “Are you musical, Miss Carew?”

“Yes; so far as loving music goes.”

"Will you play something for us?"

"Mine is such unfinished playing it could give you no pleasure," said Sybil, shaking her head sadly.

"A few hours' a day steady practice does wonders," observed Aline.

"No doubt; but——"

The entrance of Rashleigh interrupted her.

"Are you ready to start?" he asked. "The trap is at the door, and I don't suppose you would like to be out after dark."

"You can get home easily by daylight, Brian," said his aunt. "That horse of yours is good for eight miles an hour. Tea will be ready directly."

"Thank you! I should rather be off now—unless *you* want to stay," to Sybil.

"I am quite ready to go. I wish you had heard Miss Rashleigh play. It was wonderful," she exclaimed.

"Some other day. I am coming over next week—Monday, I think, Lady Elizabeth. The squire seems to think he wants me. He is awfully tired and has settled himself for a snooze in the study. Come along, Sybil."

Adieux were exchanged.

"Good-bye for the present." I hope, now you have broken the ice, you will often come and see us," said Lady Elizabeth, with polite cordiality, to Sybil.

"Very pleased to have seen you," echoed Aline.

They did not go to the hall, however, to speed the parting guests; and Sybil soon found herself once more seated aloft beside her new friend.

Leaving the level terrace in front of the house, Rashleigh took a road which swept round to the left,

instead of the more direct avenue by which they had approached.

"We are going back by another way?" asked Sybil.

"Yes! I want to show you a little of the country. Well! You did not find them so formidable, eh?"

"No! They were very nice. Then you know I am never afraid of people, only of—Why Brian," suddenly breaking off—"this is not the same horse!"

He looked into her eyes, with a wonderfully soft amused expression in his own.

"No. This is one of my uncle's steady old carriage horses. You might fire off a cannon at his ear and it wouldn't startle him. I would not have your drive home spoilt too, so I left Rufus behind. My men shall ride the roan back and bring my horse home to-night or to-morrow morning. Now please attend to *me* and do the agreeable, instead of watching the horse's ears and clutching my arm when I most want to use it."

"You are very, *very* kind," murmured Sybil, colouring with surprise and gratitude at his consideration.

"I must admit you mastered your fear well when I told you bluntly to keep your hands to yourself. That is real pluck, you know. You must come and drive with me pretty often, and you'll soon get accustomed to horses and their whims."

"I should like it very much."

"I am not such a brute as I used to be, eh?"

"No. You are immensely improved."

"Ah! I shall develop into an angel by-and-by, if you take a proper amount of trouble with me."

"If you were an angel we should not be such good friends. The soul of friendship is equality."

"Very well. Then I renounce all hopes of a commission in the angelic host." Then, touching the horse lightly with the whip, "Look alive, old lady! You have a good many miles to go."

Sybil was struck by her companion's unusual joyousness and readiness to talk. He was really good-natured under this rough stern exterior. He had a heart hidden away somewhere under his apparent selfish indifference.

"How old were you when your father died?" he asked abruptly.

She told him.

"Poor fellow. He must have been still a young man. Great pity he left the service. He'd have been high up by this time and you would have had an admiring court of A.D.C.'s and aspiring subs."

"That would have been very nice. But why only subs? Why not colonels?"

"They have generally survived the inflammable period—though it begins late and lasts long with some—and, by Jove! you seemed to bring the poor old squire back to life. He was a 'gone coon' to such an extent that he forgot her ladyship never allows champagne save on state occasions."

Sybil laughed merrily.

"He was very funny about my grandmother," she said.

Then Rashleigh returned to the subject of her father and spoke of the high opinion several men he knew had expressed of him.

Sybil listened with moist eyes and glowing cheeks, while her opinion of Rashleigh advanced by leaps and bounds.

"There," he said, suddenly pulling up. "There's a good view of the old place."

They had reached the level of the stream, and the house showed well among the trees on the height above. It was a perfect winter's day. The frost had grown sharper since morning, the sky was clearly blue, the westering sun was red, and already the hazy breath of evening was thickening round his dying couch in cloud-land, but the brown leafless trees showed the tracery of their branchlets against the still vivid light.

"It is a delightful old place, and might be made charming," said Sybil. "I am sorry for Lady Elizabeth and Aline to be obliged to leave such a home. I suppose when Mr. Rashleigh dies it will all be yours!"

"It will. Of course the wife and daughter have always known they must go, so it will not seem hard."

"It is, I think, most unjust that a nephew should inherit before a daughter."

"Well, I do not. Women couldn't manage the land, or represent the county, or——"

"Oh! I should not want the land or a seat in Parliament—only the house and grounds."

"I am afraid you are not very logical."

"I dare say I am not. Probably I feel more than I think."

"I fancy you do. As to my poor old uncle, I am sure I am in no hurry for his death."

"Ah!" cried Sybil, with a sudden upward yearning glance from her speaking eyes. "What is the use of life if one cannot enjoy it?"

"That's more a man's than a woman's sentiment," said Rashleigh, "and shows that *you* haven't had too much enjoyment in your own."

"I have been very miserable, often—but don't let us talk about it now. I am enjoying *this!*"

"So am I," he returned briefly. "Now, are you warm enough?"—taking the whip and reins into one hand to tuck the rug closer round her. "Haven't you a fur thing to put round your throat?"

"No; but I am not cold."

He spoke to the horse, and it set off at a round pace.

"I must take care of you, you know. I always fancy we must be related somehow. What degree shall we adopt—uncle or cousin?"

"Oh! my prophetic soul! my uncle!" cried Sybil. And they laughed.

"I am afraid your *prophetic* soul was anything but complimentary to your uncle," he returned.

They talked easily, frankly, and the minutes flew.

"Night had closed around the wanderer's way" before they reached the Priory. Rashleigh assisted her to alight with infinite care, and they walked up from the stables together in the most friendly fashion.

In the hall they met the parlour-maid, who said immediately:

"If you please, miss, would you go upstairs to Miss Parry? She wished you to be told as soon as you came in."

"I hope she is not ill?" exclaimed Sybil anxiously.

"No, miss. She is packing up."

"Packing up!" in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes 'm. She had a telegram at five o'clock, and wants to catch the 7.20 train for London."

But Sybil was already half-way upstairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANGE OF TACTICS.

SYBIL found Miss Parry sobbing bitterly in the midst of chaos; her bed strewn with various garments, her drawers pulled out to their fullest extent, her wardrobe open. A large box was on the floor.

"Minty, dear, what is it?" she cried, embracing her friend.

"Oh, Sybil! she is dying! My poor sister-in-law! I found a telegram when I came in, not a quarter of an hour ago. Here it is." She pulled a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket. "It is from my brother."

Sybil read, "She is sinking fast. Pray come to us."

"I could not hesitate. What a state they must be in, all those poor children! and Mrs. Rashleigh is quite vexed at my going. What else could I do? And my train goes at 7.20. It is nearly six now." A fresh burst of tears.

"My poor dear Minty. You are too upset to do anything. There is quite time enough to get ready. I will pack for you. You must have something to eat and some tea."

"I couldn't swallow it, and I do not like to give any trouble."

"Nonsense, Minty. I will go and speak to cook, and Mary will bring it up."

Sybil ran quickly downstairs. In the hall she almost ran against Rashleigh.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Sybil told him shortly. "Oh, Brian!" she exclaimed, "may I send your servant to order a fly to take Miss Parry to the station? I don't like to send any of the others."

"Yes, of course. I'll send him myself. What's the train?"

"7.20. Thank you, Brian—thank you so much!" and was gone to propitiate cook.

"You'll not want *all* these things, Minty," was Sybil's remark when she returned to the mourner. "You are not going to *stay* away. Let me fill that small portmanteau. If you want more I can send them."

She proceeded to pack up what Miss Parry directed—the directions being largely interspersed with exclamations, tears and sorrowful anticipations.

"Minty," interrupted Sybil, as she closed the portmanteau, "have you any money?"

"Yes; enough to take me to town. I have a little put away in the savings-bank, but I must give notice to get it out. I wish you would put yours there, Sybil, instead of keeping it in a box."

"I am glad I can get at it now, for you *must* take five pounds. You can pay me when you get your money. Now I shall make you take some tea and try to eat a little. Do, dear Minty," etc., etc.

The fly was at the door; the good-natured Mary had carried down the portmanteau.

"Mrs. Rashleigh is at table," said Miss Parry, as she descended the stairs accompanied by Sybil. "I will not disturb her to say good-bye. You will explain, dear?"

"Yes, certainly. Don't waste your time on her," and Sybil hastily wrapped a thick shawl round her and put on her hat to accompany her friend.

By the time they had reached the station, Miss Parry had recovered composure. They were, of course, too soon, and were consequently able to have a good many last words.

"I must not forget to tell you, Sybil, that as Mrs. Rashleigh consented to let you have a new dress and cloak, I went down to Brown's late this afternoon. You said you would like black serge. I chose a very nice one. You must go and see about it at once."

"Thank you, Minty, I will. Oh! how sorry Dick will be to hear you have been obliged to go away. I do trust you will not stay long. I shall begin my letter to-morrow."

"I scarcely know what I shall do, my love. And, Sybil, I *am* thankful that Captain Rashleigh is so much nicer than you expected. By the way, dear, don't you think, as he is so friendly, you ought to tell him of your engagement?"

"Do you think I ought?"

"Yes, certainly I do," with unusual decision.

"I will reflect upon it, Minty. Oh! there is the bell. Good-bye, my dear, my only friend. Be sure you write to-morrow—just a few lines."

"God bless you, dear," sobbed Minty. The next moment the train was vanishing.

Miss Parry had paid and dismissed the cab, so Sybil walked back through the cold dark streets, feeling unutterably alone and miserable. How awful it was to be left face to face with Mrs. Rashleigh! How wretched to have no one to speak to. Certainly Brian might be some sort of help, but he could be no substitute for Minty.

"I must see Mrs. Rashleigh as soon as I go in. She will have finished dinner. I hope Brian will have gone away somewhere. I hate speaking to my grandmother before him."

Sybil had walked quickly, for the station was more than a mile distant, and the way seemed very long in the dark. She rang at the great entrance, and as soon as the door was opened she perceived Rashleigh's tall figure as he came out of the dining-room.

"How did you come back?" he asked.

"Oh! I walked, of course."

"And why the——I mean, why did you? You should not have come through those dark streets alone."

"I did not think of it—not till I was half way here. Is Mrs. Rashleigh still in the dining-room?"

"Yes."

"Then," said Sybil, with a sigh, "I have a message for her, which I had better deliver at once." And she entered the dining-room, followed by Rashleigh.

"Miss Parry desired me to say how sorry she was to be so hurried that she could not come in to say good-bye, but she was greatly agitated and afraid of losing her train."

"I must say Miss Parry has shown very little politeness or consideration," said Mrs. Rashleigh, coldly. "To

leave in this abrupt fashion is very reprehensible, especially as we are so near Christmas."

"I cannot see how it was to be avoided," returned Sybil. "The appeal from her brother at such a time was irresistible. Think of the state he must be in without any woman to help him, or to care for those poor little children. If you will allow me, I will gladly do all I can to fill her place." She spoke softly and deliberately.

"I am afraid it would be leaning on a broken reed to trust to you, Sybil. What do *you* know of household matters?"

"One must make a beginning some time," murmured Sybil. "I can at least write for you, or do anything of which you think me capable. I shall say good-night now."

She turned to leave. Rashleigh had watched her while she spoke, and felt strangely moved by her pallor, by the sorrowful look in her eyes, the slight quiver of her lips. He stepped forward and laid his hand on the bell.

"You must have some dinner, Sybil; you must be famished. Shall I order dinner?" he asked his step-mother.

"Do you want anything?" she asked her granddaughter, in a harsh tone.

"Oh, no! nothing whatever, thank you. I had dinner at my usual time, and some tea with Miss Parry, and I want to put her things in order, and so I shall not come down again."

She moved towards the door, but Rashleigh cut off her retreat.

"This is folly," he said harshly; "you must at least take a glass of wine. There's some very fair claret here," going to the table and laying his hand on the claret jug.

"As Captain Rashleigh is so good as to ask you, you ought to take it," said Mrs. Rashleigh, in an indescribable tone of disgust and displeasure.

"Thank you," returned Sybil firmly, "I have so rarely tasted wine that it would do me no good now, and I only want to go away."

"As you like!" said Mrs. Rashleigh, indifferently.

Sybil raised her eyes to Brian's, and gave him a look that said "Let me go," very distinctly. He followed her into the hall, and lit her candle.

"Don't sit up making yourself miserable over your fire; go to bed and forget your troubles in sleep," he said kindly, holding out his hand. "Good-night!"

He held her hand closely for an instant; something in his clasp comforted her, and she gratefully returned his pressure.

"Thank you. Good-night!" she murmured.

When Rashleigh returned to the dining-room, his stepmother had already risen. He took up a position on the hearthrug; this, under some circumstances, is equivalent to a declaration of war.

"It strikes me," he began, in a calm, judicial tone, "that you don't understand your granddaughter, and what is more, you never will, because you dislike her. Dislike is sure to make mistakes. Why shouldn't she help you as well as Miss What's-her-name? She has more brains—she is more capable. *Why* don't you like her?"

"My dear Brian," returned his stepmother, quietly, though she was quivering with annoyance and anger, "you do not yet know Sybil Carew; she is a curious subtle creature. *I* have studied her for nearly three years, you have been here for little more than two months; which of us is likely to know her best?"

"By George! I believe I do. I find her a frank, plucky, bright young creature, and I can't understand how you come to dislike your own flesh and blood. You have kept her back, and in a way hidden her. Come, now! it won't break you to dress her like a lady, and show her off. Most women would be proud of a granddaughter like that. Of course, now the other one—Miss Parry—is gone, Sybil must dine with us every day."

"That will be awkward. When Miss Parry returns I cannot separate Sybil from her, and as they have been in the habit of dining together with me in the middle of the day, a habit I have only changed while you are my guest, it is not necessary——"

"Ah! well, you need not count on me after Christmas; I am going to hunt in Leicestershire. But seriously, I am distressed to see you treat Sybil like a hanger-on in disgrace. I can't understand it; you were a capital judicious mother to me. Why can't you be just to her? Let her make herself useful to you; you'll come to like her better. What has put you against her?"

Mrs. Rashleigh's quick brain worked with a will during the pause which ensued; then, in a low voice, and with an air of painful hesitation she said:

"It is *not* dislike, it is precaution which actuates me. Only to yourself, my dear Brian, would I confide the

real motive of my conduct. My unhappy daughter, Sybil's mother, was decidedly eccentric—nay, more, excitable to a degree; in fact, I firmly believe that death saved her from an asylum. Her headstrong determination to marry that ruined Irishman against my prayers—my wish—proves it.”

“Ah! I thought the eccentricity was on the father's side,” said Rashleigh, looking at her keenly and sternly. “I don't think her running off with a handsome, attractive man, as Carew must have been, had any mark of insanity.”

Mrs. Rashleigh did not like his look, but she answered steadily:

“Both parents were eccentric, Brian, and, considering what I have observed myself and what I have heard from Miss Parry, I thought it wiser to keep her free from excitement of all kinds—in fact she is not fit to bear exposure to the trials and temptations of social life.”

Brian laughed—a short, scornful laugh.

“If that girl is mad, why, we live in an insane world! Grant, however, that your theory is right, she needs gentleness and indulgence rather than repression. Now, as you have been a mother to me, I intend to return the obligation by looking after your granddaughter, be she sane or insane.”

“You were always the most generous of men,” she returned caressingly, “and I earnestly hope your view of the case is correct. I have generally found your views sound, and in this matter I will be partially guided by them. God grant we are not making a mistake. I have been a little overdone by the events of

the day; you will excuse me, dear Brian, if I retire to my own room—at my age excitement of any kind is trying.”

“Of course—of course, pray don’t mind me.”

“Pray ring for Stone,” said Mrs. Rashleigh, “I shall want her arm upstairs.”

Brian obeyed; and when that functionary appeared, bade his stepmother a cool “Good-night.”

So profoundly struck was Mrs. Rashleigh by this ominous championship of Sybil by her all-important stepson, that she quite forgot to accept the support of her handmaid’s arm, and mounted the stairs vigorously and rapidly. “He went out to light her candle,” she said to herself, “but he never offered to assist *me*. Great Powers! Could it be possible that Brian, harsh and cold as he was, entertained any sort of liking or passion for that provoking chit, whom it was impossible to conquer or to crush? If he did, he would have his way. He had never yet hesitated or failed to possess himself of what he wanted. Could it be possible that he would ever make her his wife? If so—adieu to her tenancy of that desirable family mansion known as The Priory. Sybil would be more than human if she did not do stern justice and use her influence to eject her old tyrant. She must insist on the theory of insanity, and prove it. In this Sybil should help her. She could accomplish a good deal by judicious irritation. But the scheme required extreme caution. Brian was capable of doing wild things if roused by opposition.”

Meantime the chief object of her thoughts strolled into the library, lit a cigar, and sat down by the writing-table, on which stood a shaded lamp. He dipped his

pen in the ink, but sat in deep reflection instead of beginning his letter. Could Mrs. Rashleigh's terrible doubt of Sybil's sanity be well founded? What! Was it possible that bright quick-witted creature, the very embodiment of health and instinctive common sense, could be of unsound mind? He was astonished at the thrill of pain that ran through him at the idea—it was absolutely insupportable. He rose and paced the room, debating the question in his own mind. Nothing fortified him so much as the recollection that in the first instance his stepmother laid the charge of transmitted insanity against the father, and finding him (Brian) incredulous on that side, changed the venue and attacked the mother. Could it be that Mrs. Rashleigh, whom he had always considered a rigidly high-minded woman, could stoop to lies and scheming?

It looked very like it. Well, he would wait and watch, while whatever of power or influence he possessed should be used to help and protect her. He conjured up her eyes, with their infinite variety of expression; the soft sensitive-looking mouth, that could smile so mischievously or seem so sad; her pluck, her cowardice, her spirit and impetuosity, her daring severity towards himself, the graciousness of her forgiveness. "Why, I am growing an idiot myself by heaven!" he muttered, half aloud, suddenly tearing himself from the vague delicious sweetness of this vision. "This won't do!" and he laughed at himself. "Old Brabazon used to say that if I ever took the fever it would go hard with me. It would be strange if I did. Why, she is twelve years younger than I am, and I have always found young girls the biggest bores in creation. *She*

certainly is not; one can talk to her. Why the deuce does she shut herself up to-night, to cry and make her eyes red? It's hideously dull down here. What a life she must have had here all these years. I'm glad that companion has been so good to her—capital woman! Hope she won't come back, found she has been often in the way. One can never talk comfortably before a third person," and at last Rashleigh settled himself to write.

* * * * *

It was amusing and certainly pleasant to come down next day to a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with Sybil, who looked rather pale and heavy-eyed.

"Lain awake half the night, eh?" said Rashleigh, gazing at her, "and now you have a headache!"

"No. I feel a little tired and stupid. I did lie awake, but not all night. I could not help thinking of Miss Parry. What a sad meeting between her and her brother. I do hope the poor sister-in-law will recover. How terrible it must be to leave her dear children to the care of strangers."

"I suppose the father counts for something," said Rashleigh, handing some Kedgerees to his companion.

"For very little," she returned. "What can a poor man do, who is away at an office all day? No thank you—not any."

"But, I say, Sybil, this will not do. You must eat. Try some ham. I insist on your trying."

"Very well, I will try. You speak as if you were a man in authority!"

"So I am! Haven't I soldiers under me?"

"Yes; but you cannot say to *this* woman, 'come,' and she cometh."

"No, by Jove! You are right there! My only plan would be to say 'go;' then you might stay."

"You are a marvel of penetration," said Sybil, laughing.

"What are you going to do?" asked Rashleigh. "Have a drive? There's no 'meet' to-day."

"I am not sure! I must see what Mrs. Rashleigh may want. I feel I am my dear good Minty's *locum tenens*."

"Yes, do! Make yourself amiable and useful to her."

"Useful, I will, if I can—amiable, I will not. Nature forbids."

"Come, Sybil, it is very unbecoming in a woman to be a good hater."

"If a woman cannot hate, neither can she love!"

"I am not so sure."

"My dear Brian, I don't think you know anything about it."

"How do you know, madam?"

"I don't *know*! I divine."

"I must say you are a cool hand to talk in this way to *me*—*you*, a chick hardly out of your shell!"

"Yes; I dare say I am ignorant enough; but I have certain instincts."

"You are not wanting in audacity, though you *are* frightened by the innocent capers of a horse. And that reminds me. What do you say to a drive? Let us start early and go round by Deerham. Have you ever been at Deerham?"

"No. I should like to go very well; but I must first know what my grandmother wants, and then I must do some writing. I did nothing yesterday."

"What are you about?" asked Rashleigh. "Your life and adventures? or a thrilling novel?"

"Something much more dignified. A new history of England."

"Ah! You intend to give Macaulay the go-by, eh?" returned Rashleigh, smiling and thinking she spoke in jest.

"I shall leave him a few of his laurels, perhaps. Do you want *all* the *Times*, Brian?"

"No. But you are not a politician, I devoutly hope."

"I don't know enough to care now. I want to see if there are any reviews of new books, or plays, or concerts."

"Here you are," he returned, handing her half the paper. "You care for these things?"

"Yes, very much. Reading about them keeps me from feeling buried alive." She looked through the broad sheet and then read for some minutes with deep attention. Then she started up and asked, "Have you finished breakfast, Brian? Then I will ring and ask if Mrs. Rashleigh is ready to see me."

"Then let me know what you are going to do. I shall stroll down to the stables, and return by the time you have received your general orders."

Rashleigh lingered a little longer over his paper, but he did not read it very attentively.

"Tell me that girl is of unsound mind! Why, she is as sound as a bell. After all, it is uncommonly jolly to find a pleasant, spicy, graceful creature, ready to

pour out your tea for you in the morning. But it would be rather sad to find oneself face to face with such a woman as—say, Aline Rashleigh.” So thinking he rose and, putting on a cap, went away to the stables and spent some time in conference with his groom, and a few minutes in caressing Oscar, whom he brought back to the house with him. In the hall he met Sybil. “How have you got on?” he asked.

“Better than I expected. I am evidently not to be trusted with much of the housekeeping. Stone is preferred before me, but I am to write some letters and make some entries into an awful account-book; besides, Joy of Joys! I am to do some shopping. I suspect you have been playing the part of fairy godfather, if there ever was such a thing. I am to have a new dress and a variety of vanities. I can hardly believe my ears. So I am going to convince myself by choosing the garment at once. I only wish my grandmother had given these directions as if it was a pleasure to her.”

“But she did not!”

“She *looked* as if she was forced to utter the words by some patent particular agonizing internal screw that forced her will round the wrong way. Still, I am greatly obliged to her *and* to you, for I fancy *you* are the screw.”

“Come! Give her the credit of good intentions; and will you drive with me?”

“I am afraid I cannot. I must go out now to do various commissions and my own shopping. In the afternoon I *must* scribble, so do not trouble about me.”

“All right, I will come with you now if you will let me.”

"Oh, no! I could not shop with you looking on."

"You are deucedly unfriendly! Remember you will see no more of me to-day if you won't come out in the dogcart. Mrs. Rashleigh and I dine at the Deanery, and to-morrow there's a meet at Acol ferry."

"Of course that is my misfortune, but it cannot be helped."

Rashleigh turned away, feeling more annoyed than he cared to acknowledge to himself. He ordered out his dogcart to give Rufus a long day of it and tame him a little. "He'll be all the steadier when she comes out with me again," he thought. "Glad I have brought the old lady to her senses."

The next morning brought Sybil a sad letter from Miss Parry. Her sister-in-law had breathed her last before Araminta had reached the end of her journey. She described the husband's grief, the bewilderment of the orphans, the desolate confusion of everything in a few pathetic words.

Sybil was glad that Brian had gone away early to the meet, and that she was free to shed sympathetic tears over Minty's letter, unwatched. Beside this sorrowful missive, however, came a charming one from Tremaine, full of life and hope and tenderness. How good and true he was! How grateful for her letters! So anxious to hear of her meeting with Brian Rashleigh, and eager to know how she liked him. Tremaine had as yet only heard that he was expected. As soon as Sybil had composed herself, she went to communicate the contents of Miss Parry's letter to Mrs. Rashleigh. She would not read it aloud.

"I suppose Miss Parry will absent herself for a con-

siderable time," observed that lady stiffly. "The result may be that she will teach me I can do without her. I find Stone very intelligent and much less expensive. If you choose to assist me with the accounts and by writing, you can save me a good deal."

"I am quite ready to do all I can," returned Sybil, not a little dismayed at the prospect of the Priory without Minty.

That afternoon Mrs. Rashleigh told her she was going to call on one or two people in the town, and would need her arm. When, however, Mrs. Rashleigh called her up for inspection before setting forth she changed her mind.

"I think I shall only go to our nearer neighbours," she said, "and I shall not take you with me. Miss Parry should not have left me so long in ignorance of the condition your wardrobe was in; you are not exactly in visiting trim. Be sure you go to Brown's to-day and tell him—no, I shall call myself."

Meditating ruefully on the terrible outlay her stepson's whim respecting Sybil entailed, the stately dowager sallied forth, and Sybil, thankful to be free, started for a ramble in the woods with Oscar.

She rarely went there in winter, but to-day was so bright and dry she felt tempted to visit the gamekeeper's family and tell them of Miss Parry's departure. She greatly enjoyed her lonely walk, though a soft tinge of melancholy pervaded her thoughts, which dwelt much on the sorrows of her good friend Araminta. What ages ago it seemed since she had first met Tremaine there! How sympathetic he always was! How nice it would be to live with him always! Only she wished it

was to be anywhere but in China, which must be a most uninteresting place. "I am getting on well with my work; that is the great comfort at all events. I had quite three hours and a half straight off last night. I hope they will dine out soon again, as I am to appear in the evening—that is a great drawback to the comfort of Brian's friendliness. There is something awfully oppressive in Mrs. Rashleigh's efforts to be polite—I infinitely prefer her openly-shown dislike." These musings brought her to the keeper's lodge, where she had a friendly talk with Mrs. Evans. The little girl in whom she had interested herself so much was away from home, staying with an aunt beyond Freightsborough, etc. At length Sybil, bethinking her that her old black demi-toilette dress must need repairs, as she had not worn it for more than a year, started for home, reaching it at dusk.

She felt rather nervous at the idea of the dinner. Suppose Brian were in a bad temper?—which was not impossible, and he did not look pleased when they had parted the morning before. How sternly angry Brian *could* look! How different from Tremaine's sunny expression!

When the gong sounded, Sybil reluctantly entered the library, which seemed cosy and tempting, with a bright lamp and a glowing fire. Rashleigh was standing on the hearthrug, talking to his stepmother, who was ensconced with her knitting in an armchair. The moment she crossed the threshold Rashleigh's eyes sought hers with an eagerness which surprised and for a moment discomposed her. She was vexed to feel the colour mounting in her cheeks.

"Ah! good evening to you!" he said, moving from before the fire and placing a chair for her. "I hope you executed your shopping successfully. I left you yesterday morning starting to perform some extensive transactions at that emporium of fashion, Brown's."

"Yes, I did all I wanted. And you—had you a good run?"

"Splendid! Best day I have had yet!" While he spoke, Rashleigh stood between Sybil and her grandmother, looking down at the former. She was too much engaged watching the edge of her skirt to make sure that it quite covered a pair of somewhat shabby shoes to notice his glances.

"I thought you might have stayed at the Wyndhams'," said Mrs. Rashleigh, "and sent for your clothes."

"They asked me, but I wanted to get home. You make me so deucedly comfortable, you see," turning to her with a pleasant smile.

"He *is* in good humour!" thought Sybil. "Thank goodness! for I couldn't exactly give him thrust for thrust before Mrs. Rashleigh!"

Here dinner was announced. Rashleigh gave his arm to his stepmother, and Sybil came demurely after.

In the course of the repast, Rashleigh asked, with an air of interest, if Sybil had heard from Miss Parry, and expressed a proper amount of sympathy with the misfortune which had befallen her brother; indeed, he did most of the talking, for Mrs. Rashleigh was oppressively silent, and Sybil kept her tongue as quiet as she could.

Coffee was served in the dining-room, and when

they adjourned to the library, Rashleigh asked why there was no piano in the house.

"There is one in the morning-room," said Sybil.

"Oh, that is only the worn-out ghost of a piano. You ought to have something better," and Rashleigh took up one of the newspapers which lay on a table.

Some weary minutes dragged on, and then Mrs. Rashleigh said gently:

"I feel unusually fatigued to-night. I must ask you to give me your arm, my dear Sybil, and I shall go to my room."

Sybil rose obediently.

"When you have seen Mrs. Rashleigh safe to her quarters," said Brian, in the most matter-of-course manner, "I will show you some sketches of our hunting-camp last year. I brought down the book this evening."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Rashleigh, pausing, "that sounds very interesting. I must stay and inspect them too."

Sybil looked at Rashleigh and saw such a keen expression of annoyance on his face that she could not help smiling—a quick amusing smile, which he answered by a shake of the head as he brought over a large sketch-book.

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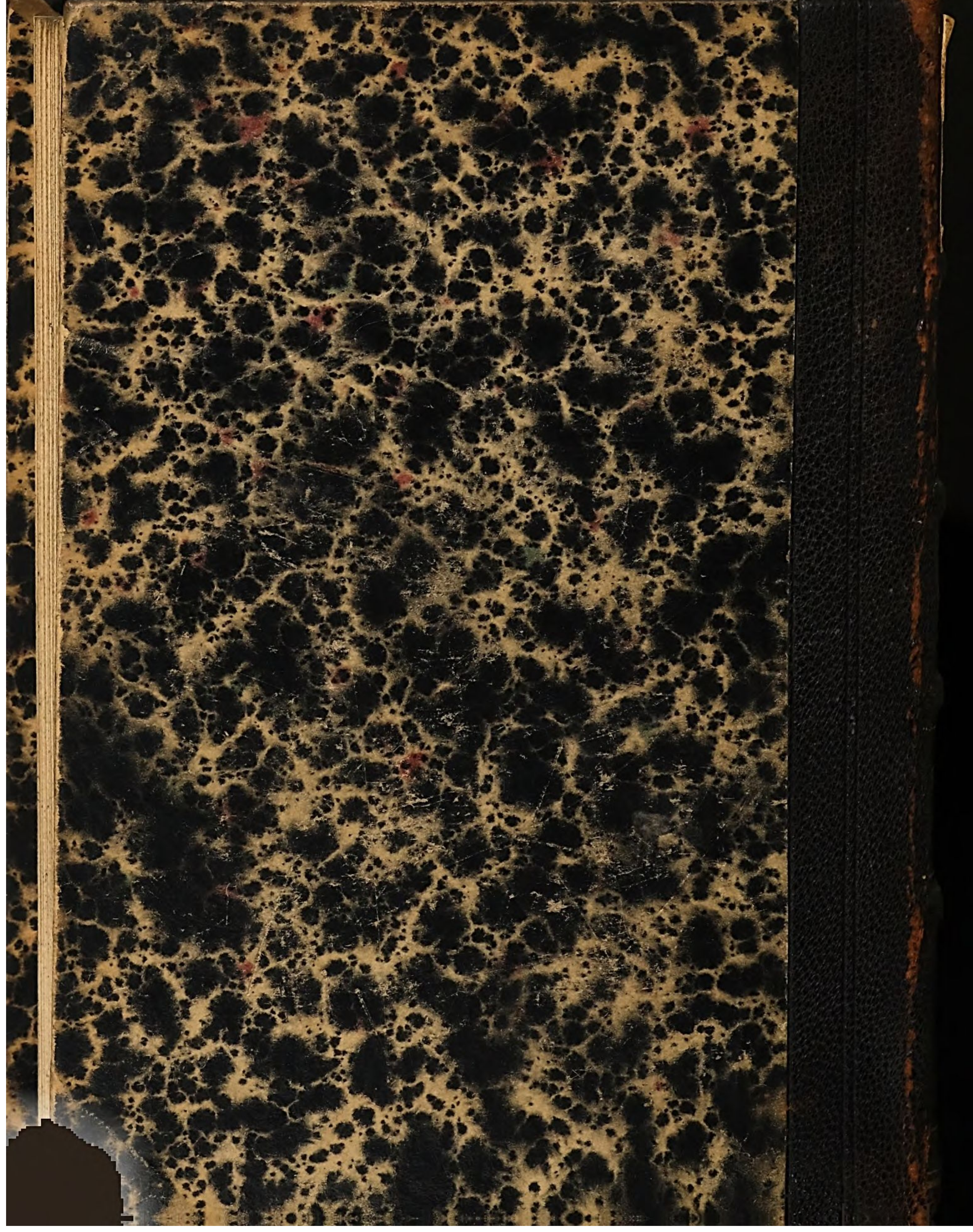
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